

4 June 2014

Barbara Smith
mail@hef.org.nz

Dear Barbara

Thank you for your letters dated 22 April 2014 about the homeschooling application form.

One of the Government's better public services targets is to have 98% of children participating in Early Childhood Education by 2016. This requires a collaborative effort from the entire education sector.

Currently, schools collect this information in their enrolment forms. To ensure that we are getting an understanding of the entire student population, we are also gathering this information for children who are applying to be homeschooled, which is why the homeschooling application form has changed.

Please see the Government's Better Public Services website for more information:
<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices.aspx>

The key requirement regarding the progress and achievement being recorded was added to the application pack in May 2013.

If a parent applies for an exemption to homeschool, then the onus is on the parent to provide evidence that what they are doing is as regular and as well as what the child would receive at a registered school. It is not a new requirement to record progress and achievement, however this is a helpful form of evidence to show a child's progress over time. When applying to homeschool, parents need to describe how they plan to assess their child's progress and therefore the teaching and learning programme. The aims or learning objectives should be specific, measurable, appropriate, achievable and regularly assessed.

Evidence of learning is especially beneficial during an Education Review Office (ERO) review. The following information was provided from ERO that helps clarify this:

ERO bases its reviews on the evidence provided by the parent that education is occurring. There is a clear onus on parents, to maintain their exemption, to be able to assure themselves, the Ministry and ERO of their programme and the learning that is taking place.

ERO would not expect parents to develop evidence of learning just for an ERO review, but because it is useful (and ethical) for the educator (parent) to not only notice, recognise and respond to their child's interests, strengths and needs, but also to monitor and record their child's achievement and progress over time. Only then can they (the parent) be satisfied that their child is being educated as well (or better) than they would be in another setting.

ERO could not accept as valid the "it's in our heads" argument, as this does not apply adequate accountability or provide assurance that the 'as regularly and as well' criteria is being met. Inability to provide any evidence that demonstrates children's learning, progress or achievement means that ERO cannot be assured that the intention of the Act is being realised.

ERO is open to a variety of evidence. However the 'as regular' criteria would, to a reasonable person, imply some sort of record of learning, including the dates, times, events.

Similarly, record keeping would also apply to the 'as well' criteria - so some sort of overview (photos, documents, reflective journals, student work records or online records) would be a minimum. Again no reasonable person could be expected to remember over several years what had been learnt, let alone have a valid means of knowing that the child is making progress and learning at the level expected of their peer group.

The responsibility on ERO is to be open to different ways of going about education and to have an appreciative and open response to what parents and children are showing us and telling us by way of evidence. We are also responsible to the government to ensure its goals for education are met.

ERO takes this responsibility seriously. Our reviewers are highly experienced education professionals who work across a huge range of education settings. We select people for our 'home school review' team who are able to relate to a wide variety of educational philosophies, practice and delivery.

I hope the information above helps clarify for you the progress and achievement section of the homeschooling application form.

The Ministry would like to establish an ongoing relationship with the Home Education Foundation. We would like to be in contact with you shortly to seek consultation about reviewing our processes for homeschooling.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim Greening". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "G".

Jim Greening
Group Manager
Sector Enablement and Support