

REGISTRATION FOR HOME EDUCATION IN NSW

To register as home educators in NSW, parents need to contact the Education Department (Office of the Board of Studies) and indicate this intention. The Department duly sends a form to be filled in and returned, and eventually arranges for an 'authorised person' to telephone you to arrange an inspection. The inspection may or may not take place in your home (your choice) and may or may not involve your children (your choice). If you choose to see the inspector without your children you are expected to provide adequate documentation to demonstrate their educational progress. For more information, call the Office of the Board of Studies on (02) 9367 8149 or visit their web-site www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au.

As I understand it, the inspectors (in both NSW and ACT) want to be satisfied that:

- your kids are not being abused (in any sense of the word);
- your kids are not being exploited (just kept at home to work in a business);
- your kids will not grow up as anarchists (not know how to work with others); and
- your kids will not be disadvantaged as adults (and become a liability to society).

My husband and I do not believe that any Departmental requirements interfere with our authority over our family. Indeed, we feel strongly that it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that each child is educated to a standard that ensures he or she can make a positive contribution to society in adulthood. We accept the democratic notion of restricting the freedom of individuals for the good of the community. By insisting that all parents need to register before they home educate, the government has more opportunity to apprehend those parents who are undeniably negligent in raising their children.

Our Family History:

Our son (an only child) attended the Emmaus Christian School as a part-time student (1-2 days per week) from Kindergarten to early in Grade 2. As part of his school enrolment we needed to officially register as home educators (but would have done so anyway).

We have never viewed registration as a negative experience in any way. All our interactions with the Department have been positive. Periodic inspections ensure that I keep my records up-to-date and have introduced an element of accountability for our son.

We have had 4 inspections so far (1999, 2002, 2004, 2006) each lasting for 1 to 2 hours (usually prolonged by us). The two inspectors who have visited us have been retired principals from NSW Schools. Both were friendly, polite, encouraging and helpful.

All inspections have been in our home. My husband has always been present to meet the inspector, but until this year (when he is taking an active part in the home schooling effort) he did not take part in the interview itself. Our son has been involved with each inspection, sometimes demonstrating skills to the inspector, eg. reading (when he was younger) or playing the piano.

We show the inspector everything that is vaguely relevant—books, artwork, prizes, and examination results. I prefer to be over-prepared, with too much material, rather than being caught short and have to find examples of work when the inspector is waiting to see it. I am too old to cope with that sort of pressure!

The volume of documentation I maintain for our home education effort has increased markedly with time. It is largely for my own benefit (an aging memory problem) but conveniently satisfies the requirement of the Education Department. Initially I framed my reports within the Key Learning Areas (KLA) defined by Departmental guidelines, but have moved away from those categories over time as they did not suit our approach to schooling.

Both inspectors emphasised that they didn't want the documentation effort to be a useless burden to us, advising us to keep only those records that we found useful.

Documentation for our first inspection (Kindergarten) consisted of a hand-written summary of resources I planned to use, grouped under KLA headings and a token weekly schedule. At that interview, the inspector was impressed that Stevie was reading reasonably well, writing neatly (one of those skills boys seem to lose with age!) and could talk in (mostly) coherent sentences. I had been concerned that not all areas were 'adequately covered', but the inspector was happy with what he saw and gave us a two year certificate.

The second inspection was with the same inspector. My plans and summaries were more comprehensive, but still hand-written, and I felt a bit more organised. My daily records consisted of scrawled notes in diaries (but, most days, Stevie kept a neat summary in his diary). I acknowledged those areas where I felt we had problems and noted how we were dealing with them. We were embarking on full-time home schooling and explained why.

The third inspection was with a new inspector who was quite chatty and probably more relaxed. Our documentation and confidence had both increased, though I recall a last minute rush to get everything ready. We had a rough daily timetable in place and kept track of planned and completed work in a year planner from LEM, plus an A4 diary. I had started to type up annual summaries and plans, but needed the inspection deadline to finish them.

I now prepare daily schedules for each week's home schooling work. Finished work is ticked or otherwise noted on these sheets so they also serve as a record and are filed in a ring binder. I make an annual summary of all work undertaken and progress perceived (which saves the last minute rush before an inspection). At our last inspection, the inspector welcomed this summary as it made his job much easier. The Department also asks to see written plans of future work (which I duly prepare but rarely follow). However, the plans do help me to keep track of reading material that I intend to use and to order topics that I hope to cover.

Since we are only home schooling one child, the next inspection will be our last. Registration is not required for children over 15 years of age.

Suggestions:

To prepare for Home Education inspection, I would recommend that each family try to:

- (1) **Create the impression of order.** So, tidy up:
 - your house—anything the inspector will see;
 - your children—they need to look cared for; and
 - yourself—look like you are capable of teaching them.
- (2) **Create the impression that you know what you are doing and where you are going.**

So, document:

- resources—curricula, books, games, equipment, craft, music, sport, classes, etc;
 - results—tests (especially external), projects, awards;
 - activities—especially with other children and external instructors; and
 - plans—show an understanding of Key Learning Areas (KLA).
- (3) **Create the impression of a united front with support from friends and family.**

Have your husband (or maybe father or brother) present if possible. Think about whether any children under 6 years old could be minded elsewhere during the inspection.

- (4) **Create the impression that you are part of society and co-operate with its 'authorities'.**

Be polite and respectful—this is a good example to your children for the rest of their lives.