

April 2014 Newsletter

NCHENZ Executive Committee Update

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Notice of AGM

A notice has gone out to members regarding the NCHENZ Annual General Meeting which has been set for 2pm on Saturday 14th June (teleconferencing from venues all around the country). Almost all of the existing Committee are planning to stay on which is absolutely fantastic. However, we'd love people who have a passion for what is happening with home education at the national level to consider joining the Executive Committee – you do not need to have been homeschooling for a long time by any means, you just need an interest in volunteering a small amount of time for NCHENZ. We meet once a month via teleconference for an hour or so, and connect regularly by email. It's not a massive commitment but it makes all the difference to the home educating community in NZ ... many hands make light work for all of us. If you're considering joining us, please email info@nchenz.org.nz. To see who is currently on the Executive Committee go to <http://www.nchenz.org.nz/executive-committee/>.

Reading Eggs & Mathletics

In February we started 105 students into Mathletics and 52 students into Spellodrome; and last month 141 children began Reading Eggs! Thank you so much to everyone who emails a short note with their enrolment, we are glad you appreciate these offers being made available and that the discount helps you with your homeschooling budget. Our next Reading Eggs intake will be June/July. To see the services you can access via NCHENZ please see [Member Services on our website](#).

Homeschooler Discounts

Warehouse Stationery offers a 10% discount on their printing and photocopying services to anyone with a student ID. We followed up with them to ensure the discount is available to home educators as a couple of members have had problems accessing it – and Warehouse Stationery have confirmed it is available to homeschoolers. Only one of your children would need an ID card to receive this discount and they can be ordered through the NCHENZ website quickly and easily, see <http://www.nchenz.org.nz/student-id-cards/>.

Did you know that homeschoolers can also access the substantial discount available to educators for Microsoft products? Some retailers may not be entirely knowledgeable about this but we have been in contact with Microsoft head office and they have confirmed the discount would be available to home educators. You will need evidence that you are homeschooling so we recommend you take along appropriate student ID or your child's exemption certificate.

MOE Meeting Summarised

We had a very positive and encouraging meeting with MOE in February. The Ministry's understanding of the range of educational styles and philosophies was heartening and the staff in head office definitely see homeschooling in a positive light. Specific points of discussion were as follows:

- *Exemption Applications:* NCHENZ raised the issue of MOE considering a homeschooler's application against the NZ Curriculum when there is no legal requirement for home educators to follow the NZ Curriculum. The Ministry agreed to clarify the information in their Desk File which is what guides their regional staff who are processing applications. There was agreement that the Ministry don't want people resorting to submitting applications that don't reflect their intended educational approach, just to get sign off. There was a lot of discussion around the Ministry's focus on measures and outcomes, whereas homeschooling parents look at a much bigger picture which can be difficult to express as measurable outcomes. The Ministry suggested that they work with NCHENZ and related parties for at least half a day exploring how "as well as" can be communicated effectively in applications across a range of educational philosophies.

- *Regional Inconsistencies:* The Ministry explained how they have been working to align their regional staff towards a consistent approach, including running regular moderation sessions and working through sample exemption applications. NCHENZ outlined some of the issues homeschoolers are facing around the country and some of the inconsistencies encountered.
- *Complaints-Based Review System:* NCHENZ gained an understanding of how complaints are processed by the Ministry and what criteria a complaint needs to meet in order to be sent to ERO to prompt a review. The Ministry agreed to gather more data regarding the complaints made so that NCHENZ can understand more fully how many complaints are being received overall. Serious complaints are verified by contacting the complainant only. NCHENZ argued in favour of all complaints prompting a call to the homeschooling parents to establish the validity of the complaint rather than just those that are deemed to be “less serious” – and this was agreed by the Ministry. The issue of anonymous complaints was discussed – particularly the problems involved in communicating about a complaint with a homeschooling family whilst protecting the identity of the complainant. NCHENZ expressed that this should not be a barrier to contacting all families before determining whether the complaint needs to trigger an ERO review, and there was agreement on this by the Ministry. There was also discussion about the finality of an ERO review – home educators can either pass or fail (and occasionally may have a follow-up review and then a pass or fail) – and how out-of-step this is with other education establishments.
- *Access to Resources – Special Needs:* NCHENZ outlined the difficulty with meeting ORRS funding requirements outside of the school system, the frustration of being unable to access the level of external services available within schools, and the disadvantages of being reviewed as a special needs homeschooler due to issues accessing services. The Ministry agreed to clarify accessibility to services with Special Education staff and suggested that they set up a meeting between relevant staff, NCHENZ and interested parties regarding access to Special Education services.

- *Access to Resources – NCEA:* NCHENZ outlined the range of experiences reported from home educators and the lack of clarity regarding accessing NCEA through schools. The Ministry agreed to look at how home educators can gain access to NCEA through schools.
- *Access to Resources – Te Kura:* NCHENZ discussed issues such as not being able to access courses for free (or a reasonable rate) until a child is 16 years of age; 15yr olds having access to NCEA 1; and better access in general for home educators to Te Kura's courses. The Ministry suggested that NCHENZ meet with Te Kura to discuss, as policy and direction discussions are currently being held at Te Kura.
- *Home Education as a Valid Educational Choice:* The Ministry expressed an interest in partnering with NCHENZ to support homeschoolers and portray home education as another viable and valid form of education in NZ. The Ministry expressed a desire to gain a better understanding of the difficulties home educators are facing and also what is going well within the community.

ERO Meeting Summarised

In February we also met with ERO. The meeting was informative and a starting point for future meetings. The main points were as follows:

- *Improving relationships:* ERO staff would be interested in attending home education information evenings to talk about the review process.
- *The complaint:* ERO clarified that they do not receive an exact copy of the complaint. They do however receive a summary of issues which does not contain any identifying information about the complainant. ERO also stated that the questions in the information pack sent to parents are the basis for the review regardless of what the reason for the review is. ERO said that reviewers come in and look at the quality of the programme without the complaint forming their opinion of the family. ERO would like to hear if home educators experience otherwise. ERO assured NCHENZ that they are there to review the educational programme and not make a judgement on the family's parenting or lifestyle choices.

- *Timeframes:* Home educators should receive a minimum of three weeks preparation time as a rough estimate. The time that the review is held is negotiated with families based on convenience and availability, ERO's schedule, and the family's needs in gathering the necessary information required for the review.
- *Providing further information:* If further information is required, due to a change in the home educators programme, ERO are not expecting a new "exemption application" type document. They would expect that the reviewers would listen to the family and talk through the changes that they have made to their programme. ERO understands programmes will change as children grow. Reviewers are looking for evidence of the effectiveness of the current programme, the parents' understanding of the programme, and how the programme is being taught "as regularly and as well as" in order to progress the child educationally. The questions sent to families are to guide the process, and will be answered through conversation with parents, viewing whatever the parents have prepared for ERO, talking to the child, looking at learning resources, etc. Reviewers are not there to test the children or physically gather evidence themselves, so ERO rely on the parents to provide all the necessary evidence that the reviewers need in order to come to a solid conclusion.
- *Children's involvement:* ERO stated that children may be asked questions such as: What are you learning about? What are you reading? What have you enjoyed? What are you most proud of? What are you excited about? ... Questions to encourage the children to share rather than be tested.
- *What is expected from families and evidence:* The onus is on the parents to provide as much "evidence" as possible to ensure that ERO get a clear picture of the educational programme in the home. ERO have a broad view of what constitutes evidence – a photo album that tells a story, journals, diary entries, conversations with the child, electronic records, DVDs, etc. Reviewers should be listening to all of the information provided and taking notes to assist them in their final decision.

- *At the end of the review:* Before the reviewers leave they should be giving the family a tentative idea about the direction their decision is heading. ERO reiterated their role as public servants and the responsibility they have, under current law, to ensure that each child in NZ is being educated. It is their job to make a decision on the child's programme, based on the evidence that the family provides, and decide whether or not that programme meets the baseline of "as regular and as well as a registered school".
- *Unconfirmed report:* ERO's final judgement will be written as a brief report (approximately one page), which is called an "unconfirmed report". This is forwarded to the family who have 15 days to comment on it and provide any further information they feel has been missed. The unconfirmed report will change only if further evidence is provided by the family which changes the nature of the review or evidence gathered. The review is still considered open until the confirmed report is sent to MOE.
- *Possible options for families after a failed review:* NCHENZ questioned whether more steps could be added to that process to enable families to have a second chance, in line with the review process for schools and other educational facilities. This would make the review process a more positive experience for families and also allow them to have time to implement any changes that may help and support their children's educational experiences. ERO agreed that this is something that could be considered.
- *ERO's acceptance of different philosophies:* ERO said that they understand that home education doesn't look the same as school and explained that reviewers are well versed in the different educational philosophies. There was extensive discussion about natural learning programmes. ERO explained that no matter what type of educational philosophy is being followed, reviewers will still be looking for how the child is being extended within the programme, some evidence of what they are learning would need to be captured, how the parent is extending their interests and building on their current programme to take them to the next level would need to be explained, etc. A family might also provide research that supports the programme that the family is following. ERO are looking for clear knowledge from parents as to why they are doing what they are doing, and how their

programme is helping the child to progress. They will also be looking for basic numeracy and literacy skills within the programme, so if these are not part of the current programme sound evidence will need to be provided as to why and when that will happen.

Help the Ririnui Family

Some of you may have heard about the Ririnui family's struggles with MOE and ERO over the last several months following a very negative review experience. Our concerns are: (a) it appears that the original complaint should not have prompted a review as it was vague and did not cite specific educational concerns; (b) the reviewers did not seem to understand the family's educational philosophy and expected to see more of a school-at-home type programme; and (c) there were a lack of avenues available for the family to address their concerns without putting the children's exemptions on the line. Heather Ririnui has engaged a lawyer to try to work through the issues, and the Committee would like to donate \$200 towards Heather's legal costs. If anyone else would also like to contribute to Heather's legal fund via NCHENZ then please deposit to Kiwibank Account 38-9014-0162108-00 using "Heather" as a reference. 100% of funds received will be forwarded to Heather promptly.

Declaration Form

Home educators will soon receive their mid year declaration form from MOE, they are usually sent out at about this time. Details on completing the statutory declaration will be included with the form. Your signature will need to be witnessed by a JP or other person authorised to take a statutory declaration such as a solicitor, MP, or police officer of a certain rank. Please note that a statutory declaration is different to a sworn oath – with a statutory declaration the person you see will probably want to see some ID, they may ask "Do you solemnly and sincerely declare that you are the person referred to in this declaration and that the contents of this document are true and correct?" and they will want to witness you signing the form.

The supervisory allowance covers the preceding six months, if you have not been homeschooling for the full six months then you will receive a part-payment. More information can be found on NCHENZ website about the [Supervisory Allowance](#).

The form will be due back to MOE in June and your allowance will be paid in July. If you do not receive a form then is imperative that you contact MOE Resourcing Division (phone 04 463 8383) as it is a legal requirement that the statutory declaration be completed in order to continue to receive an

exemption to homeschool. The statutory declaration must be completed and returned even if you don't wish to receive the supervisory allowance. It is your responsibility to ensure that you return the declaration form – if it isn't completed correctly and returned to MOE then your child's exemption certificate will be automatically revoked.

Who are we?

Set up in 1998 for the purpose of advancing the cause of home education in NZ at a national level, NCHENZ is the only national homeschooling body in New Zealand. NCHENZ is a neutral organisation with no affiliation to any political or religious group. NCHENZ is run by an elected Executive Committee. If you are not yet a member of NCHENZ please join, it's free – just go to [our website](#).