

# Homeschooling Review

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27 March 2015

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## Executive Summary

This report provides Ministry Group Managers with information and recommendations about a range of issues raised by home educators, Ministry staff, the Education Review Office (ERO) and Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The Correspondence School) regarding home education in New Zealand.

A brief literature review was undertaken, focusing on homeschooling research in Australia, the UK, US and Canada. In all these countries, home schooling is legal. There are a wide variety of registration requirements across jurisdictions.

A number of caveats should be placed around the reliability and generalisability of literature about the academic achievement of homeschooled students. Overall, the literature suggests that homeschooling has a modest effect on achievement and it tends to improve verbal and weaken math capacities. The literature also suggests that family variables and the method of homeschooling instruction have an effect on student achievement. Some Australian research suggests that homeschooling provides a good alternative for students with special needs. The research also indicates that homeschooled children tend to be well socialised.

In New Zealand home education is provided for under section 21 of the Education Act 1989 which provides an exemption from attending school. Parents and caregivers who wish to educate their child at home must first have approval from their local Ministry of Education office. ERO monitors homeschooling programmes if requested by the Ministry, on the basis of a complaint.

At 1 July 2014, there were 5,838 home educated children in New Zealand, representing 0.76% of the whole schooling population, and nearly 3,000 families. On average, students spend three and a half years in home education and almost 20% of students are home educated for less than a year before they return to a school. Nearly 90% of homeschooled students identify as European. The South Island has the largest proportion of home educated students. Approximately 35% of homeschooled students are at secondary school.

In recent times, a number of policy and practice issues and concerns were raised by home educators. This led to the Ministry of Education conducting a review on home education in New Zealand beginning in August 2014.

The review sought feedback from the home education community, regional Ministry homeschooling staff, the Education Review Office (ERO), Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The Correspondence School), and the Ministry's legal services and resourcing teams.

The findings from the review are primarily focused on operational improvement. Some findings may lead to legislative or policy changes. The findings clustered into the following themes: application process, access to resources, Special Education, funding, ERO, qualifications and Te Kura, complaints and revocation process, statutory declaration, and other.

This report outlines recommendations to improve homeschooling, based on the feedback from stakeholders. This report seeks views on these preliminary recommendations and guidance on the next steps. It also seeks guidance on communicating the review findings to the home education sector. The Ministry has undertaken to next communicate with the sector in February 2015.

## Purpose

This report provides Ministry Group Managers with information to inform a discussion on the homeschooling review at a meeting scheduled for 10 February 2015. It presents information and recommendations about a range of issues raised by home educators, Ministry staff, the Education Review Office and Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The Correspondence School) regarding home education in New Zealand and current practises and policies.

## International Literature

A brief review has been undertaken of some of the international literature on homeschooling. It particularly focused on homeschooling in four countries which are often comparable to New Zealand: Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (US) and Canada.

In all the countries surveyed, homeschooling is legal. Generally, parents must provide their children with an education that is similar in standard to that which they would receive in a public school. Parents choose to homeschool their children for a variety of reasons, including a desire to provide a religious education and dissatisfaction with the educational standard and environment at available schools.

There are a wide variety of registration requirements across jurisdictions. They range from no requirement for parents to initiate any contact with authorities, through to more stringent requirements, which might include interviews of parent, teacher and child, the inspection of facilities and provision of detailed learning plans. At least two countries (Australia and the UK) have mechanisms by which a student's registration for homeschooling can be cancelled, or a child ordered to attend a public school, if it is found that the standard of homeschooling provided is not adequate. Some, but not all, jurisdictions, allow homeschooled students to attain qualifications. A number of local authorities across the UK, US and Canada provide parents with funding and/or resources to homeschool their children.

A number of caveats should be placed around the literature which reports on the academic achievement of homeschooled students. While there have been many studies of academic achievement, "unfortunately most of this work contains serious design flaws that limits its generalizability and reliability".<sup>1</sup> Issues include studies relying on volunteer homeschoolers contributing data rather than random sampling of all homeschoolers, and studies not controlling for significant variables such as ethnicity, parental educational attainment and socio-economic status. Further, much of the literature is qualitative and anecdotal in nature, and some of it is politically motivated (eg research conducted by homeschooling advocacy groups).

With these caveats in mind, overall, the literature suggests that homeschooling has a modest effect on achievement and it tends to improve verbal and weaken math capacities. The literature also suggests that family variables (eg parental educational attainment, income, religious ties<sup>2</sup>) and the method of homeschooling instruction (eg structured versus unstructured learning<sup>3</sup>) have an effect on student achievement. This finding of modest differences in educational outcomes for homeschooled compared to state schooled students extends to their achievement in tertiary

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<sup>1</sup> Kunzman, R. & Gaither, M. (2013). Homeschooling: A comprehensive survey of the research. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 2(1), p16.

<sup>2</sup> For example see Hennessy, S. (2014). Homeschooled adolescents in the United States: Developmental outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(4), pp. 441-449.

<sup>3</sup> For example see Martin-Chang, S., Gould, O., & Meuse, R. (2011). The impact of schooling on academic achievement: Evidence from homeschooled and traditionally schooled students. *Journal of Behavioural Science*, 43(3), pp. 195-202.

study.<sup>4</sup> Some Australian research suggests that homeschooling “provides a good alternative for students who have learning difficulties or disabilities, showing advantages both academically and socially”<sup>5</sup>. The research also indicates that homeschooled children tend to be well “socialised” despite not learning in a school environment.

The following table (table 1) provides a brief overview of homeschooling in Australia, the UK, the US and Canada.

**Table 1. Overview of home education in Australia, UK, USA and Canada**

<b>AUSTRALIA<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>CANADA<sup>7</sup></b>
<b>General requirements regarding home education</b>			
Vary for each state. Parents must either register their child for home education or gain an exemption from the compulsory attendance requirements.	Education must be “efficient”, “full time” and “suitable”.	Every state has a compulsory attendance law requiring children in a certain age range to spend a specific amount of time being educated. Home schooling is lawful in all 50 states.	Each province has its own rules. Most require that home schooling parents must comply with Education Act, ie the child must receive “satisfactory” instruction.
<b>Application process and requirements</b>			
Varies by state. Some states require exemption of child from school, others require registration for home schooling. Can also require interview of parent, teacher and child, inspection of facilities and require detailed learning plans.	Must advise school and local council if child is being taken out of school to be home schooled.	Varies by state eg <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no requirement for parents to initiate any contact.</li> <li>• Parental notification only.</li> <li>• Parents to send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress.</li> <li>• Other requirements eg curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, or home visits by state officials.</li> </ul>	Varies by province. Most provinces require parents to register children, four provinces require an application to be made.
<b>Review process</b>			
Varies by state. Usually includes monitoring of child’s progress, requirement to periodically renew registration,	Local council can make enquiry regarding home schooled student to ensure they’re getting a suitable education, can serve a school attendance order if they	Fewer than half the states require testing or assessment. In some states, homeschoolers are required to submit the results of a standardised test.	Some provinces issue curriculum guidelines but do not require curricula to be government approved. Other

<sup>4</sup> Kunzman, R. & Gaither, M. (2013). Homeschooling: A comprehensive survey of the research. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 2(1), pp. 4-59.

<sup>5</sup> Allan, S. & Jackson, G. (2010). The what, whys and wherefores of home education and its regulation in Australia. *International Journal of Law and Education*, 15(1), p65.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Basham, P. (2001). Home schooling: From the extreme to the mainstream. *Public Policy Sources*, 15. A Fraser Institute Occasional Paper.

government can cancel registration.	have concerns (requires parents to satisfy local education authority that the child is receiving such education).		provinces require educational plans be submitted and approved by government.
<b>Access to qualifications</b>			
No information to hand at time of writing.	Students don't have to follow national curriculum, however they can take General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A-Levels) exams privately.	Wide range of options from "school in a box" curricula to correspondence programmes and diplomas. Some states allow graduation, in others, homeschoolers receive no official recognition.	Varies by province.
<b>Access to resources</b>			
Tasmania allows access to distance education resources. This is not permitted in other states.	Department of Education recommends local authorities take a flexible approach to support for home educating parents where appropriate eg for examination fees.	Some states require public schools to give homeschooled students access to district resources, such as school libraries, computer labs, extracurricular activities or academic courses. In some states homeschoolers meet with a teacher periodically for curriculum review and suggestions. Other states refuse to allow homeschoolers to participate in extracurricular activities.	Three provinces provide funding to home schooling parents.
<b>Special education needs</b>			
No information to hand at time of writing.	Where children have "statements" of special education needs that set out home education as the appropriate provision, the local authority has a statutory duty to arrange the special educational support set out in the statement. Funding may be provided.	No information to hand at time of writing.	No information to hand at time of writing.
<b>Number of homeschooled students</b>			
Estimated at 30,000 homeschooling families.	20,000 registered, but actual number estimated at 80,000 students.	Estimates range from 850,000 students (1.7% of school-age population) to 1.7 million (3.4%).	Estimated at 80,000 students.

## Home Education in New Zealand

The following section sets out key features of home education in New Zealand, including:

- legislation
- policy and practice
- demographics.

### Legislation

In New Zealand home education is provided for under section 21 of the Education Act 1989 which provides an exemption from attending school. The Act states that:

An employee of the Ministry designated by the Secretary for the purpose (in this section and section 26 referred to as a designated officer) may, by certificate given to a person's parent, exempt the person from the requirements of section 20,—

(a) on the parent's application; and

(b) if satisfied that the person—

(i) will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school; or

(ii) in the case of a person who would otherwise be likely to need special education, will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a special class or clinic or by a special service.

### Policy and practice

Parents and caregivers who wish to educate their child at home must first have approval from their local office of the Ministry of Education.

Parents wishing to home educate their children must complete an application for exemption, which is then assessed by their local Ministry office. The Ministry will decide if the application shows that the child will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school. The Ministry is required to be “satisfied” of this before issuing a certificate of exemption from enrolment in a registered school.

A homeschooling supervision allowance is paid in June and December each year and covers the preceding six months. The first payment for a child new to homeschooling covers the period since the date of the issue of the Certificate of Exemption. The annual amounts paid are:

first child	\$743	second child	\$632
third child	\$521	subsequent children	\$372

Payment is subject to confirmation that the parents continue to meet the requirements under which the Certificate of Exemption was given. They must complete a statutory declaration to confirm this, twice a year. The statutory declaration needs to be signed by a person authorised to do this by the Oaths and Declarations Act 1957.

The Education Review Office (ERO) monitors schooling in New Zealand, including home schooling programmes if requested by the Ministry of Education. This is currently only initiated on the basis of complaints. If ERO's review indicates that they cannot be satisfied that section 21 (ii)

of the Education Act is being met, the Certificate of Exemption may be revoked and the student will have to return to a registered school.

An exemption will automatically cease once the student turns 16 or enrolls in a registered school.

## **Demographics**

At 1 July 2014, there were 5,838 home educated children in New Zealand, representing 0.76% of the schooling population of 771,646 students.

Those 5,838 students came from 2,964 families. In 2014, the median number of home educated students per family was two and the largest number was nine.

Approximately 1,000 students start and finish home education each year, representing around 17% of the homeschooling population. In 2014, 478 families applied for exemptions for other children, having already been granted an exemption for an older child(ren).

The average time a child spends in home education is three years and six months. Almost 20% are home educated for less than a year before returning to school (just over 1,000 students). Another 15% are home educated for one year, equating to 35% (or approximately 1,900) students who are home educated for one year or less.

Approximately the same number of girls and boys are home educated. Of those, 86% (4,760 students) identify as European, 0.07% (400 students) identify as NZ Māori, 0.02% as Pasifika (100 students) and 0.02% as Asian (100 students). Table 2 over the page shows the length of time students are home schooled by ethnicity and gender.



**Table 2. Number of homeschooled students by gender, ethnicity and length of homeschooling, at 1 July 2014**

Years	European		Māori		Pasifika		Asian		Other		Unknown		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
> 1 yr	455	401	46	45	16	14	7	10	28	22	24	20	576	512
1 yr	316	313	37	45	8	5	11	11	12	26	26	23	410	423
2 yrs	282	300	22	21	9	9	7	10	13	16	11	11	344	367
3 yrs	203	250	17	16	6	4	7	7	14	9	5	2	252	288
4 yrs	236	214	20	20	6	2	1	5	7	3	4	1	274	245
5 yrs	194	171	14	16	6	0	4	5	5	5	1	0	224	197
6 yrs	141	181	9	14	3	2	1	2	4	2	1	1	159	202
7 yrs	145	132	8	11	1	3	3	1	5	7	3	2	165	156
8 yrs	120	111	9	5	0	3	1	2	5	0	2	2	137	123
9 yrs	124	104	6	8	0	3	2	1	1	0	4	5	137	121
10 yrs	51	58	0	2	0	2	1	1	3	2	1	3	56	68
11 yrs	32	46	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	36	53
12 yrs	12	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	15	14
13 yrs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
+														
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,311</b>	<b>2,295</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>2,785</b>	<b>2,770</b>

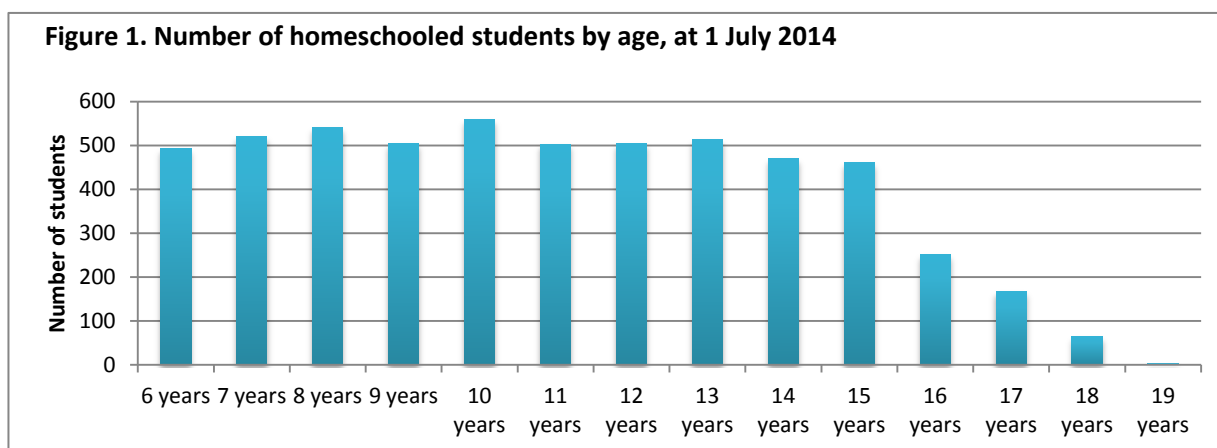
Within New Zealand, the South Island has the largest proportion of home educated students (61%). The region with the highest number of home educated students is Auckland, with 23% (approximately 1,300) of all students. This is followed by the Waikato region, with 15% (approximately 830) of students and Canterbury with 14% (approximately 760) of students. Table 3 shows home educated students who finished homeschooling in the year ending 1 July 2014, by region and the length of time they were home educated for.

**Table 3. Number of students finishing homeschooling in the year ending 1 July 2014, by duration and region**

Region	Number of years of homeschooling														Total
	> 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13+	
Northland	9	8	9	8	6	3	6	4	2	7	6	4	1	0	<b>73</b>
Auckland	58	36	30	14	18	6	20	8	12	22	10	15	4	2	<b>255</b>
Waikato	28	16	6	12	11	7	15	4	7	14	7	4	3	0	<b>134</b>
Bay of Plenty	11	9	6	5	4	2	4	2	4	7	3	2	1	1	<b>61</b>
Gisborne	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
Hawkes Bay	5	1	2	3	4	1	2	2	2	4	1	0	2	0	<b>29</b>
Taranaki	4	5	3	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	<b>19</b>
Manawatu-Wanganui	15	6	10	8	8	1	4	7	7	10	8	3	5	0	<b>92</b>
Wellington	11	11	6	4	4	7	2	4	2	6	3	2	4	0	<b>66</b>
Tasman	6	1	7	0	3	0	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	<b>22</b>

Nelson	6	4	1	0	0	2	3	2	1	3	3	0	0	0	<b>25</b>
Marlborough	3	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	5	1	1	0	0	<b>16</b>
West Coast	3	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	<b>12</b>
Canterbury	34	12	10	5	11	8	5	7	13	17	8	7	1	1	<b>139</b>
Otago	4	1	3	2	1	1	1	0	1	5	2	2	0	0	<b>23</b>
Southland	3	3	3	1	3	1	0	1	0	2	3	0	1	0	<b>21</b>
Unknown	7	2	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	<b>23</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1,051</b>

Approximately 35% of homeschooled students are in their secondary years. The largest cohort of homeschooled students is aged 10 years, as shown in figure 1 below.



Fewer homeschooled students are achieving bachelor degrees compared to all students. Of home schooled students who left school in 2009, 12% have achieved a bachelors degree compared with 26% of all school leavers.

Across the three years, an increasing number of all students are achieving certificate level 1-4 qualifications. Of homeschooled students who left school in 2009, more (64%) achieved a certificate level 1-4 qualification than all students (56%). However, this was reversed for students who left school in 2011, with fewer homeschooled students (82%) receiving certificate level 1-4 qualifications than all students (86%).

**Table 4. Proportion of tertiary qualifications gained by homeschooled students compared with all students, for school leavers in 2009, 2010 and 2011, at December 2014<sup>8</sup>**

Tertiary Qualification	2009		2010		2011	
	All	Hsch	All	Hsch	All	Hsch
Honours degree/postgraduate cert/diploma	4.2%	3.1%	0.1%	0.9%	0	0
Graduate cert/diploma	0.8%	0.6%	0	0	0	0
Bachelors degree	26.1%	12.1%	15.5%	9.7%	0.5%	1.5%
Certificate levels 5-7/diploma	13.3%	19.8%	14.5%	18.1%	13.2%	16.5%
Certificate level 4	20%	23.6%	23.6%	19.6%	26.5%	17.2%
Certificate level 3	23.7%	22.8%	29.5%	30%	36.2%	31.5%
Certificate level 2	10.5%	17.7%	14.5%	18.5%	19.8%	30.8%
Certificate level 1	1.4%	0	2.2%	3.2%	3.9%	2.4%

All = all students; Hsch = homeschooled students

Fewer homeschooled students are achieving bachelor degrees compared to all students. Of home schooled students who left school in 2009, 12% have achieved a bachelor's degree compared with 26% of all school leavers.

As at December 2014, across the three years, an increasing number of students are achieving certificate level 1-4 qualifications. We expect some of those students to go on and take undergraduate or more advanced qualifications over time. Of homeschooled students who left school in 2009, more (64%) achieved a certificate level 1-4 qualification than all students (56%). However, this was reversed for students who left school in 2011, with fewer homeschooled students (82%) receiving certificate level 1-4 qualifications than all students (86%).

## Review of Home Education

In recent years, a number of issues and concerns have been raised by home educators. Consequently, in August 2014, the Ministry of Education began a review of home education in New Zealand.

### Consultation with the home education sector

The review sought feedback from the home education community. In September 2014, the Ministry requested feedback from around 2,480 home educators (for whom email addresses were available). This represented around 84% of all homeschooling families. The Ministry received 365 responses. A summary of that feedback was provided to home educators for their further comment in November. A few extra points were raised, including responses countering some of the issues identified by other parents.

Meetings were also held with internal Ministry of Education homeschooling staff (including regional staff, legal, resourcing and schooling policy teams), the Education Review Office and Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (the Correspondence School).

<sup>8</sup> More students will be enrolled in tertiary study and working toward achieving a qualification. Those students are not counted in table 4. For example, a student who left school in 2011 and is studying toward an honours degree, four years full-time study, is mostly likely to graduate in early 2016.

In 2014 the Ministry's Red Tape Clutter Buster team also met with home education stakeholders to identify possible improvements to homeschooling in New Zealand. This work occurred in parallel to the homeschooling review. Their feedback is included in this summary.

Every effort has been taken to ensure all the feedback the Ministry received is accurately reflected in this report.

## **Findings**

A number of findings were identified through this process. The findings have been clustered into themes under the following headings:

- Application process
- Access to resources
- Special Education
- Funding
- ERO
- Qualifications and Te Kura
- Complaints and revocation process
- Statutory declaration
- Other.

### ***Application process***

A number of home educator respondents indicated they were happy with the current application form. They said it was a good process to go through as it made them think more in depth about their plan for their child's education and what will be needed. Some respondents suggested that the application stage presents an opportunity for the Ministry to establish relationships with home educators and is a chance for the Ministry to reflect support for the choice that home educators make.

Other respondents were generally unsatisfied with the application process. This group considered the application form too intrusive, it asks for too much information and takes too long to process. Some respondents also noted that Ministry staff have asked for information in addition to what is requested on the application form.

Some respondents would like students to be considered a 'justified absentee' while waiting for their exemption. They were of the view that the application form is school-based and does not allow the home educator's philosophy to be considered. They also were of the view that there are inconsistencies in the way regional Ministry of Education homeschooling staff process applications, the information they require and varying levels in their attitudes and understanding of home education.

A large number of respondents would prefer to complete a 'notice of intent to home educate' rather than be required to complete an application for approval. Others would prefer to complete one application per family, rather than one per child. A large number of respondents requested that the application form be available online. They would also like to be able to track the progress of their application.

Some respondents would like to see the question about early childhood education and the need for a Principal's comment removed from the application form. Some also said they do not like the application asking for a timetable or a topic plan as they feel this does not fit with some philosophies of home education.

Respondents were unclear about what is expected of the content of and process for their application, and when they should be applying. They did not want the definition of 'as regular and as well as' more tightly defined. They would also like to know why applications are declined and to have more information on the appeal process for when this occurs.

Issues were raised around the length of time taken to process applications. Some respondents said they don't hear back from the Ministry for four to six weeks and feel this is too long.

Regional Ministry of Education homeschooling staff would also like improvements made to the application form and process. They would like the application form and other documents in the parent pack written in plain English. Some staff said that the quality of applications they received varied considerably. They said they almost always require more information than what is provided in the initial application to make a judgement about whether the child will be taught 'as regularly and as well as' at a registered school.

Ministry staff would like definitions or examples of what 'as regular and as well as' means and criteria and guidelines on how to evaluate applications and the process for asking for more information. They would like to see a self review sheet replace the checklist with the application form. Staff would like clear guidelines on how much weight should be placed on the Principal's comment.

It is of concern to some staff that the current policy makes it very hard to decline applications and they feel this leaves them no choice but to approve applications they have reservations about. It is also of concern to staff that a number of applications are from students aged over 6 years old (even up to 8 years old) who have never been enrolled in school. Equally as concerning is where a child withdraws from school before an exemption is granted. Staff are generally unsure about why exemptions can't start when the student is five rather than six years old.

Ministry staff raised concerns about when applications are received. Applications are received at a steady rate throughout the year and peak in December. In some cases, such as when schools are closed for holidays and/or the Principal is unable to be contacted, processing applications can be delayed for reasons beyond the control of Ministry staff.

Staff would like clarity about how many times they should be going back to parents/guardians for more information to satisfy the Ministry that they meet the criteria, and also whether and when a visit to the family is needed. Staff and some home educators would like staff training in the different home education philosophies.

Another point raised by staff is that whangai children cannot apply for home education as it is a requirement that the legal guardian or parent make the application.

### ***Access to resources***

Home educator respondents said that they lack access to resources, compared to mainstream schooled children. They would like access to more of the resources and discounts that schools get such as testing materials and careers advisors. They would like written guidelines on what is available and how to get them. Examples of specific resources that some home educators would like access to are workshops at public art galleries, Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom education programmes, free short courses at Wairiki summer school and Pond. Online resources such as lesson plans, workbooks, practise tests and model answers were also requested.

Some Ministry staff would like to see training services available for home educators to increase their skills in various areas eg mathematics training.

Respondents said that resources needed to sit the Cambridge exams, such as science equipment, were hard to access. Some respondents would like a hard copy of the New Zealand curriculum sent to them once the exemption has been granted, however, others opposed this idea.

Both staff and some home educators felt they would benefit from the Ministry identifying which schools are open to home educators using their resources.

Some home educators would like their children to be able to receive an ID card. Although these are currently available through Home Education groups, some said they do not wish to be a member of these groups and would like an ID card.

Some home educators raised queries regarding gifted students and the need to ensure they get the resources that they need such as being able to sit in on university lectures.

### ***Special Education***

Home educators requested that more special education resources be made available such as teacher aide, reader/writer resources and speech language therapists. Some requested extra funding for children with special education needs.

Feedback from the Red Tape Clutter Buster project and Ministry staff noted *“Clarity is required around the accessibility to Special Education funding and support for those students who are not currently engaged in a mainstream context. Parents and students in particular need more transparency and clearer criteria around what they can assess or are entitled to.”*

### ***Funding***

There was consensus amongst home educators that the amount of funding paid to home educators is too low. They noted that funding has not been reviewed or increased in at least 15 years and is not inflation adjusted. Respondents were of the view that current funding is not enough for home educators to purchase the resources they need. A number of respondents considered there were significant inequities compared to students in schools who are funded at higher rates than home educated students. Respondents also considered that funding should not decrease for consecutive children who are home educated. A few respondents said they would like funding to start at age five and continue until the child finished their education (eg up to age 18 if they can prove they are gaining qualifications).

A few respondents said they would like extra funding for activities that require specialist teachers, such as music lessons.

### ***Education Review Office (ERO)***

Across the home education sector, feedback was received that the current process of ERO completing reviews on a complaint basis is not ideal. It has created tension between ERO and home educators, and also between home educators and the Ministry. A number of home educators would like ERO to conduct random reviews again, meaning ERO's involvement would be from a more supportive stance rather than the result of a complaint.

Some Ministry staff and some home educators raised concerns at the lack of monitoring undertaken for home educated students and the risks associated with this for vulnerable children. Some respondents expressed concern that the application form only considers the child's first year of education so when they get to secondary level it is impossible to tell if the child's education is still 'as regular and as well'. Some respondents suggested that if parents change the curriculum they use they should inform the Ministry.

Regional Ministry staff would like to be able to request ERO reviews for applications that have been approved but for whom they have some residual concerns or queries. They would also like the roles of the Ministry and ERO to be more clearly defined.

Home educators said they would like ERO to be supportive, to understand home education philosophies and not monitor them in the same way as schools. They also noted that if schools receive a poor ERO review they are assisted and given a chance to improve. On the contrary, negative reviews for home educators often directly lead to a revocation of their exemption.

Both home educators and Ministry staff would like the criteria ERO use to assess the quality of home education to be reviewed.

### ***Qualifications and Te Kura***

There was consensus amongst home educator respondents that it is difficult for their children to access qualifications such as NCEA and Cambridge exams. One barrier identified was the gateway into Te Kura which is free only when the child is 16 years or over. A number of home educators would like their children to be able to access Te Kura for NCEA at the beginning of the year in which their children turn 16, or alternatively, in the year that they turn 15 years old. A few respondents also requested free access to some Te Kura papers for advanced students or students who need extra help in certain subjects.

Some respondents mentioned that alternatives to NCEA (eg Cambridge exams) should be communicated to the sector. Some respondents would also like home educators to have unrestricted access to university bridging courses.

### ***Complaints and revocation process***

Some survey respondents expressed concerns about the complaints process. Some suggested that anonymous complaints should not be allowed. Other respondents would like the Ministry to ensure complaints are valid and about educational concerns before progressing with the complaints process. They would like to see any child welfare concerns forwarded on to Child, Youth and Family and not be dealt with by the Ministry.

Ministry staff would like more guidance on how to decide what priority a complaint should be given and for the complaints process to be clearer.

Some home educators and Ministry staff said they would like a clearer and fairer appeal process for revocations.

### ***Statutory declaration***

Some survey respondents would prefer once yearly statutory declarations, as opposed to the current twice yearly. They would also like to remove the requirement for the document to be signed by a Justice of the Peace or equivalent and for the declaration to be emailed to them or available online.

Ministry staff would like clearer processes around what happens when home educators are granted their exemption after the date that statutory declarations are posted out and on who holds the responsibility for ensuring people receive the form.

### ***Other***

A number of survey responses referred to the way the Ministry managed its role in home education and how it managed relationships. Some comments were that the Ministry are like “big brother” with power, unsupportive, unapproachable and inconsistent. They would like Ministry documents to be “in a nicer tone” and more uniform.

A number of respondents prefer to be called 'home educators' rather than 'home schoolers', to reflect what they do more accurately.

Some survey respondents requested an option for 'dual homeschooling' with the student being able to be home educated a few days a week and attend a school for the rest of the week.

A number of respondents wanted to remove the requirement to record progress and achievement.

Some home educators raised concerns about Work and Income New Zealand policy that does not allow parents to be on a benefit and home educate.

A number of Ministry staff and home educators requested that the Ministry and/or home education groups hold voluntary group seminars or free workshops. These could cover issues such as assessment and strategies for teaching children with special education needs.. Some respondents suggested that an optional database for home educators who wanted to get in touch with other home educators would be a good idea.

Ministry staff would like some administration issues clarified such as what administrative database systems should be used and how and where files should be kept. Ministry staff would like the forms and appendices on the website to be one document and for the FAQs to be updated to reflect actual questions they receive (eg how to access university without a qualification).

Some Ministry staff would like the criteria regarding when students go overseas or trial a school to be reviewed as there are discrepancies.

### **Responding to the findings of the review**

The Ministry has considered all the feedback received during the review. The feedback has been summarised and actions have been recommended for each suggestion received. The findings from the review are primarily focused on operational improvement. Some findings may lead to legislative or policy changes. The Ministry has drafted a work programme to respond to the recommended actions resulting from the review. Appendix 1 outlines the work programme, noting the objective of each work item and the steps to be taken to achieve it. This report seeks your views on these preliminary recommendations and guidance on the next steps. It also seeks guidance on communicating the review findings to the home education sector. The Ministry has undertaken to next communicate with the sector in February 2015.



Appendix 1: Detailed summary including work programme - 27 March 2015.

## HOME EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK RECEIVED FROM HOME EDUCATORS, ERO, TE KURA AND MINISTRY STAFF (INCLUDING MINISTRY WORK PROGRAMME)

### APPLICATION PROCESS

Some of the feedback received said the application form and process was very useful as it helped parents to think about how they will home educate their children. Others said:

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>APPLICATION FORM</b>			
Complicated	Simplify form	We agree the content of the application form needs to be reviewed, updated and made more user-friendly.  The need to balance home educating philosophies with the Ministry's requirement to ensure children and young people are being schooled "as regular and as well as" a registered school is the fundamental challenge.	MOE will commission a plain English review of the content to be completed by 30 June 2015.
In "edu-speak"	Use plain English		
Intrusive	Review content		
People write what they think the Ministry of Education want to hear to try to ensure the application is accepted, rather than what they will actually be doing	Review service guidelines for homeschooling and for completing the form		
Parts of the application form are unclear e.g. is it for the first year or the child's entire home educating journey?	Discuss with Group Managers		
The application form is too long and takes a long time to fill out e.g. some parts are duplicated	Review content		
The application comes from a school lens and doesn't fit with home educator's philosophies. The application should ask about the home educator's philosophy and approach to teaching or ask what sort of home educating is planned e.g. structured, unschooling, etc.	Provide guidance on how to demonstrate education.		

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>APPLICATION FORM cont.</b>			
Should not ask for a timetable, or a topic plan as timetables do not reflect home education philosophies as it is 24/7	Review content	We agree that asking for a timetable is not always the best way to identify whether education is “as regular and as well as”. It will therefore be one of the ways parents may demonstrate this. MoE need to be sure the child will get an education “as regular and as well as” a registered school. We do need to see evidence of a plan in place to ensure the child’s areas of strength and weakness, when they arise, will be worked on as they would in a registered school. We do not expect parents to pre-empt what these actual issues will be, however, we need to be convinced parents have clearly thought about this and how they would address this.	Practice guidelines will be reviewed and updated by June 2015.
The application form should ask for childrens strengths and weaknesses and what work will be done to address the weaknesses	Review content		
The Ministry of Education should not ask about Early Childhood Education participation in the application form	Ascertain why this is requested and review content of form accordingly.	This is how we collect data on Early Childhood Education participation for our records. We need this information.	No change.
The Ministry of Education should not ask the principal to comment on a home educating application.	Review requirement for principal to comment	This requirement will remain however, this feedback will only form one part of a wide range of information collected to assess the application; it will be considered within that broader context.	This will be part of the practice guidelines review, to be completed by the end of June 2015.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>APPLICATION PROCESS</b>			
Would like to be able to apply online or via email and be able to track the application's progress	Assess feasibility	MoE agree that there is merit with an online application process. We will look into the feasibility and cost of this.	MoE will investigate feasibility by end of June 2015.
The Ministry of Education should not require the home educator to have an in depth knowledge of child's learning abilities or techniques before home educating has started	Review application requirements the content	MoE needs to be sure the child will get an education "as regular and as well as" a registered school. We do need to see evidence of a plan in place to ensure the child's areas of strength and weakness, when they arise, will be worked on as they would in a registered school. We do not expect parents to pre-empt what these actual issues will be, however, we need to be convinced parents have clearly thought about this and how they would address this.	Application form will be reviewed to clarify that we need to be confident there is a plan in place to indentify and address any learning challenges and build on strengths. This will be part of the plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.
One application per family rather than an application per child. Or a more full application for the first child and then a smaller and more simple application for subsequent children	Review application requirements for subsequent children	The Ministry agrees that we could look to have a smaller application/education plan for subsequent children, however, it will always need to be specific to individual children's needs.	MoE will look at this as part of the plain English review of the application form to be completed by the end of June 2015.
Want to be able to apply for an exemption when a home educated child is five years old, rather than waiting until they are six.	Create clear guidelines on the application process (eg: when to apply and why, appeal process when application is declined, why applications will be declined)	MoE agree with this.	MoE will implement a change that allows for parents to apply for an exemption when the child is 5 which will commence once they turn 6. This will happen by the end of April 2015.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
APPLICATION PROCESS cont.			
Would like MoE to be clear about when people should be applying	Create clear guidelines on the application process (eg: when to apply and why, appeal process when application is declined, be clear why applications will be declined)	MoE agrees with this.	This work will be undertaken in conjunction with the plain English review of content to be completed by end of June 2015. It will also link to the change to allow parents to apply when their child is aged 5.
A notification of intention to home educate should be sufficient. An “application” should not be necessary	Ensure rationale/legal requirements to apply for exemption are clearly set out in information and communications.	MoE disagrees with this recommendation. Legally, we need to be sure the child is being taught “as regularly and as well as” a registered school and the application process is therefore necessary.	No change.
Students should be able to be at home during the application process (as a ‘justified absence’)	Review if children can be classed as ‘justified absence’ when applying for home schooling	The law requires children to be at school between the ages of 6 and 16. This will not change. By allowing applications from age 5, the majority of applications should be processed prior to the child turning 6. Parents need to apply 4-6 weeks before wishing to commence home education. In cases of issues within the school that a child is attending, parents should talk to the school and involve the local MoE office regarding the application process.	No change.
The appeal process for having a declined application reviewed is not clear	Clarify the appeal process	MoE agrees and will update the appeal process and communicate it clearly.	The update of the appeal process will be completed by the end of June 2015.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>APPLICATION PROCESS cont.</b>			
“As regular and as well as” should not be defined any further; it should be kept as a broad guideline	Create practice guidelines on the interpretation of the definition.	The legislation will not be defined any further but clearer practice guidance will be given to staff.	Practice guidelines will be reviewed and updated by June 2015.
Home educators should not have to reapply for exemption, when returning from overseas travel	Review the guidelines in relation to overseas travel	MOE agrees that the guidelines need to be reviewed.	MoE will review this policy as part of the Plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.
Ministry of Education should provide an anonymous summary as to why exemptions were withdrawn for the past few years.	Ensure guidelines regarding the application process are regularly updated with examples of successful and unsuccessful applications.	MoE agrees with this recommendation.	We will do this by the end of May 2015.
<b>OTHER</b>			
The Ministry should be clear what the reasons for declining applications are	Create clear guidelines and create declining letter template.	MoE agrees with this recommendation.	MoE will review declining criteria and make this clear to home educators. This will be done as part of the review of the complaints and appeal process to be completed by the end of June 2015.
The process is scary, partly because of assumptions made by the Ministry	Ensure process, requirements and communications are clear and professional.	MoE acknowledges this and with the implementation of new guidelines and documents this will improve.	Clear practice guidelines will be put in place by the end of June 2015.
The tone of information and application forms regarding home education makes people feel that by homeschooling you are doing something wrong	Review content and tone of all documents	MoE acknowledges this and will review both content and tone of documents.	MoE will update all documents and the website to ensure tone is better as part of the plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
OTHER cont.			
There are outdated contacts and paperwork given with the application pack	Review the content and introduce process to maintain currency of information	MoE agrees. This will be updated incrementally between March and end of June.	MoE will update documents and the website by the end of June 2015.
Would like to be called “home educators” rather “than home schoolers”	Include as part of the content changes to forms etc.	MoE acknowledges this preference.	Change to be incorporated in all communication and MoE documents and website.
Would like recognition of Home educating to be a valid educational option.	Ensure practice guidelines and documentation reflect this.	MoE agrees. However, we do have an obligation to ensure all home educated students are being educated as well as they would in a registered school. It can sometimes be a challenge to balance this.	This will be reflected in the review of the practice guidelines, to be completed by the end of June 2015.

## WHILE HOME EDUCATING

Many submissions shared their personal experiences with how home education works for them on a day-to-day basis in terms of the types of resources they use and activities they undertake with their children. Key themes involved:

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>RESOURCES</b>			
Access to resources are lacking compared to mainstream schooled children e.g. 'early readers' books, dental, eye care, speech language therapy, swimming lessons, LEOTC, school nurses, careers advisors and support, laboratories and science equipment (needed for preparation for Cambridge exams) etc.	Seek to improve access to resources	MoE will review access to resources.	Review access to resources by end of July 2015.
Would like more Special Education needs support and resources e.g. teacher aide for a few days a week or help with teaching techniques for children with special education needs. Access to resources to help those with learning difficulties achieve NCEA e.g. readers & writers is needed.	To improve access to resources	Home educators can access all student based resources provided they meet the criteria. They don't get the school based resources (such as teacher-aide). This won't change.	MoE will update documents to make it clear what special education resources are available and how to access them. This will be completed as part of the plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.
Home educators would like written guidelines on how to access support services	Ensure service guidelines and documentation provides this.	MoE agrees with this recommendation.	This will be completed as a part of the plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.
Home educators would like access to standardised tests from schools to see where their child is at	Seek to improve access to these	This is at the school's discretion.	No change.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
RESOURCES cont.			
Home educators would like to receive the same discounts that schools would	Identify resources in question and investigate increased accessibility for home educated students.	We will look into the resources mentioned and assess feasibility of this.	This will be completed as part of the review of access to recourses to be completed by the end of July 2015.
No Accelerated Christian Education provider in New Zealand.	N/A – outside of the Ministry’s span of responsibility	No comment	No change.
FUNDING			
The amount of funding is too low	Seek to review funding model (amount and length of time received)	MoE will explore options for increasing funding in the 2016/17 budget round.	To be completed in time for the next budget round.
Funding should not be reduced for subsequent children being home educated			
Extra funding is required for students with special education needs.	Seek to review access to special education funding		



Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
OTHER			
Would like the Ministry to hold group seminars or free workshops for those home educators interested in attending. They should be supportive and informative e.g. on assessment, special education techniques, meeting other home educators	Encourage regional staff to provide information brokerage role.	We agree with this recommendation.	Regional MoE offices will organise these information nights at their discretion.
Would like the home education networks contact details, or a optional database for home educators to list their details on for others to contact them e.g. internet forum	Ensure Ministry website contains contact details for home education associations. Sector to arrange and manage its own internet forum.	MoE agrees with this recommendation. We will update our website with contact details for home education associations. The home education sector needs to arrange and manage its own internet forum. The MoE will explore possibilities with the sector to support this process.	The website will be updated as part of the Plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.
Some Ministry staff and some home educators have raised concerns at the lack of monitoring done for home educated students and possible risks associated with this for vulnerable children.	Seek to review the monitoring of the “as regular and as well as” requirement of home educated students.	MoE will undertake further work to identify how best to mitigate these risks.	The review of the monitoring of “as regular and as well as” will be completed by the end of June 2015.
An option for “dual homeschooling” with the student being able to be home educated a few days a week and attending a school for the rest of the week.	Encourage and support information brokerage by regional staff	Currently some schools support this on an informal basis. However, once a child is formally enrolled in a school the exemption is automatically revoked.	No change.
Home educated children should be able to get a student ID card	Seek to improve access to these	MoE will explore the feasibility of this and will discuss this further with the sector.	MoE will look into this as part of the review of access to resources, due to be completed by the end of July 2015.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
OTHER cont.			
Would like schools and principals to be more welcoming to home educators and invite them into their community e.g. extracurricular activities, sports days etc	Encourage and support information brokerage by regional staff	This is at the discretion of the school. Ministry staff can work with schools to see what schools are open to home educators attending their extracurricular activities.	To be completed as part of the access to resources review, due to be completed by the end of July 2015.
Home educators would like a hard copy of the New Zealand curriculum sent to them once the exemption has been granted	This is available for free online.	This resource is available free online.	MoE to provide a link to this resource in the application pack. This will be completed as part of the plain English review to be completed by the end of June 2015.
Would like the Frequently Asked Questions on the Ministry's website and application documentation to be updated	Ensure FAQs on website are regularly updated	We agree with this recommendation.	MoE will update our FAQs as part of the plain English review of the application form and documents, due to be completed by the end of June 2015.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
OTHER cont.			
Recording of progress & achievement should not be needed	A child's educational progress must be able to be demonstrated.	MoE disagrees with this recommendation. This is required to satisfy MoE that the education is "as regular and as well as" a registered school.	Clear guidelines will be provided to home educators outlining what records are expected. These guidelines will be created during the plain English review due to be completed by the end of June 2015.
WINZ – work testing requirements for beneficiaries means they cannot receive income support if they choose to home educate their children; this should be changed.	Not within the Ministry's jurisdiction. The Homeschooling sector should liaise with the Ministry of Social Development.	Sector to liaise with the Ministry of Social Development	No change
Getting into universities or polytechs can be a challenge.	Encourage and support information brokerage by regional staff.	MoE will liaise with the tertiary education sector to clarify entry requirements and ensure the Ministry's website provides information and links for home schoolers.	MoE will clarify entry requirements and ensure the Ministry's website provides information by end of June 2015 as part of the review of the website.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>STATUTORY DECLARATION</b>			
Would like the statutory declaration to not have to be signed by a JP	Review the need for this	MoE is initiating a review of the statutory declaration requirements.	The review of the statutory declaration requirements will be completed by the end of April 2015.
Would like the statutory declaration to be an online form or be able to be emailed	Identify feasibility		
Would like the statutory declaration to be done yearly rather than six monthly.	Review the need for 6 monthly declarations		
<b>QUALIFICATIONS</b>			
Make other qualifications e.g. Cambridge well known as alternatives to NCEA	Encourage and support information brokerage by regional staff and provide information and links on the Ministry website.	MoE agrees with this recommendation.	This will be added to our website as part of the website review to be completed by end of June 2015.
Home educated children should have free access to Te Kura for NCEA from when the student is 14 or 15 (rather than 16)	Identify the feasibility of this.	MoE is identifying feasibility of this.	The review of the Te Kura policy will be complete by the end of July 2015.

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN GENERAL

A number of submissions referred to the way the Ministry managed its role in home education and how it managed relationships. Some of the submissions were complimentary with home educators feeling well supported. Others made the following points:

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
MOE IN GENERAL			
Ministry of Education are like “big brother” with power	Ensure all staff have background information on the home education philosophies and understand them. Encourage and support information brokerage by regional staff.	MoE agree that all staff working on home education should understand the benefit of home education and the different philosophies.	MoE will run regular internal teleconferences and meetings with regional staff to increase understanding of the philosophies of home education and the advantages of each.
Ministry of Education are unsupportive, unhelpful and don't communicate changes and don't understand the philosophies of home education			
Ministry of Education treat the Education Review Office's word as gospel			
The Ministry are unapproachable as people watch what they say so their exemptions don't get revoked			
There are inconsistencies and prejudices within MoE offices	Review deskfiles, all documents and the website	We will update practice guidelines. We also run regular teleconferences and meetings with our staff to ensure consistency with applications.	Documents and website will be updated by end of June 2015 as part of the website review.
Some Ministry staff ask for more information for things that are not required on the application form	Ensure service guidelines are up-to-date	MoE agree that guidelines need to be put in place about asking for more information.	Practice guidelines will be updated by the end of June 2015.
Ministry documents and correspondence should be in a nice tone and more uniform	Review and update the tone	MoE agrees with this recommendation.	Documents will be updated by end of June 2015 as part of the plain English review.

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
MOE IN GENERAL cont.			
Would like Ministry staff who understand and support home education to be involved in the application process and review processes	Ensure all staff have background information on the home education philosophies and understand them and that service guidelines are up to date.	MoE agree that all of our staff working on home education should understand the benefit of home education and the different philosophies.	MoE will run regular internal teleconferences and meeting with regional staff to increase understanding of the philosophies of home education and the advantages of each.
Ministry staff do not understand homeschooling philosophies			
The application stage is the Ministry's opportunity to establish relationships with home educators and a chance to reflect support for the choice that home educators make			

## EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE IN GENERAL

Some submissions referred to the Education Review Office. While some comments were complimentary with home educators finding the review process useful, others considered:

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
ERO IN GENERAL			
<p>Education Review Office (ERO) are like “big brother” with power</p> <p>ERO are unsupportive of home education and go in to assess the complaint rather than to be supportive</p> <p>ERO don’t understand the philosophies of home education</p> <p>Assessment criteria should be different to schools to reflect the differences in philosophies.</p> <p>Families need to be able to feel that ERO will work with a family, not against them</p> <p>ERO need to clarify what they are looking for in a review so families can plan for these.</p>	<p>Ensure that ERO have information on home education philosophies and practices.</p>	<p>MoE will work with ERO to ensure that reviews take account of home education philosophies.</p>	<p>This will be completed by the end of June 2015 as part of the workstream to review ERO’s role.</p>

## EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE IN GENERAL

Issues raised	Recommended action	Ministry comment	Next steps
<b>COMPLAINTS AND REVOCATION PROCESS</b>			
For MoE to make sure complaints are valid and are about educational concerns before requesting an ERO review	Review complaints process	We agree that child welfare issues should be forwarded to CYF, and that the complaints process needs to be reviewed, be fair, and made clear to home educators.	MoE will review and update our complaints process by end of June 2015.
Some would like ERO to conduct random reviews again (not just on the basis of complaints)			
Child welfare issues should be forwarded to CYFs			
A school gets supported and encouraged to improve by ERO but homeschoolers get revoked. Would like assistance to get it right rather than to be revoked.			
Would like complaints not to be anonymous.			
Would like a clearer and fair appeal process for revocations			



