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More and more Australian families are homeschooling. How can we make sure they do it well?

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Across Australia, more families are choosing to homeschool.

According to NSW figures released late last month, homeschooling registrations in the state more than doubled between 2019 and 2024, from 5,907 to 12,762.

What is fuelling this growth and how do we support families to do it well?

What is homeschooling?

How many people homeschool?

There are around 45,000 young people enrolled in homeschooling around the country. This compares to around 4.1 million school students around Australia in 2024.

The biggest growth has been in Queensland. As of August 2025 11,800 students were registered for homeschooling in Queensland. From 2021 to 2025, registrations in primary year levels grew by 110%. They grew by 167% in secondary year levels.

In Victoria, there are about 11,240 homeschoolers in 7,716 households a roughly 7% increase on 2023 numbers. As of 2023, there were around 6,500 homeschoolers in Western Australia, up from 3,720 prior to the pandemic.

Why are people homeschooling?

Academic research and media interviews with parents suggest there are several reasons a family might choose to homeschool a child.

This includes bullying, school refusal and neurodivergence.

While numbers were growing before the pandemic, COVID provided a boost. Some families found their child was happier at home. They also reported finding the flexibility better suited their child, so returning to school didn't appeal to them.

Significantly, the majority of families who choose it today did not want to homeschool before they felt it essential. Some parents report their child is receiving a better education and is much more comfortable learning at home.

How do families do it?

There are a variety of ways to homeschool.

Some families choose a highly structured "school at home" approach, which is the stereotypical whiteboard and textbook learning at the kitchen table.

Other families "unschool", which is child-led, interest-based learning through living. The day might include cooking, gardening and going to a park to see friends. Or a day of volunteering at a wildlife park. Or, it might mean a trip to the museum and creating a video about Ancient Egypt.

Factors such as parents' education, income, and belief in structure all influence the choice of approach.

But in the most structured of households, families report following the child's interests as much as possible. They also tend to focus on social and emotional needs as much as academic work.

It is estimated teachers make up around 20% of the homeschooling population. But differences between homeschooling and school mean teaching skills are not necessary to homeschool. Parents focus on children's interests, learning needs and goals to guide their approaches.

Homeschooling and the curriculum

Homeschoolers do have to meet learning goals from the Australian Curriculum in subjects such as maths, English, science and humanities.

But they do not have to follow a curriculum like students in the mainstream system. This is because the curriculum is designed to be implemented in schools and teach large groups of young people – homeschooling is more individualised.

Some families use the curriculum to guide their homeschooling approach, and may report against the levels in the curriculum to state authorities.

What about progress and development?

International large-scale, survey studies suggest homeschoolers do not suffer social issues compared to matched mainstream-educated peers.

Studies – such as this 2022 US paper also suggest they seem to do just as well overall academically as their peers at school, although they tend to perform less well in maths.

While this paper found methodological problems with current homeschooling studies, they also argue there is no evidence there are academic or social problems for the homeschooled cohort.

Other US Research shows homeschooled children are accepted into university and graduate at similar rates to mainstream students.

Families face some challenges

Homeschooling is not without its challenges. Mothers often quit work, or drop work hours, to manage the homeschooling.

Another issue is regulation. Some homeschoolers say managing the reporting requirements is daunting and stressful.

Reporting requirements vary with the state and territory. For example, in Queensland, families have to complete a report every 12 months showing progress in a high quality education. In New South Wales, education authorities make home visits where parents discuss their plans and activities.

Where a young person has neurodivergence, additional learning needs, or distress due to school experiences, reporting can be harder because families may struggle to show progress.

Our research shows bureaucrats may not understand the differences between homeschooling and mainstream school, nor recognise the depth of learning in homeschooling. Homeschoolers see the child as the most important part of the education process, whereas regulators tend to be more focused on curriculum.

Regulation has an impact

In previous research, we argued co-designing regulation with parents is better. It reflects the differences between school and homeschooling and the experiences of homeschooling families.

A September 2025 audit office report also showed current regulations are not working in New South Wales.

It found the system is unable to cope with the numbers of families moving from mainstream to homeschooling. The report states the wait time for registration is more than ten weeks (about one school term). Students are not allowed to leave school until this is complete, which can be distressing.

Other states have more effective approaches. For example, Tasmania and Queensland involve parents in homeschooling regulation which has been shown to improve compliance with registration.

Sometimes learning at home – either with family member or online through a school – is a better fit for a young person.

The challenge is to ensure policy, regulation and support catch up to families' needs.

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