

INFORMATION FOR HOMESTAY PROVIDERS

(Option 3 and 4 Arrangements)

The provision of quality homestay accommodation for international students is one of the most important responsibilities undertaken by schools in the Department of Education and Training's (DET) International Student Program.

Please read the following guidelines before signing the Homestay Responsibility Agreement.

What is Homestay?

Homestay is a term used to describe full board accommodation offered by a family, a couple or a single person for which a set weekly fee is charged. This fee covers all expenses associated with providing food and shelter to an international student. This includes providing:

- A separate single room for the student's use
- Three meals a day, seven days a week
- Facilities – a bed, wardrobe, towels and linen
- Utilities – gas, electricity, heating and water costs
- Cleaning services of common living areas
- Use of living areas within residence
- Study facilities – desk, study light, bookcase.

Homestay can be school arranged (Option 4) or family arranged where the international student's parents wish to nominate a specific person (what we call an Option 3 Third Party arrangement) in Victoria to provide accommodation for their child, but where that individual is not a parent or Department of Home Affairs (DHA) approved relative able to provide welfare.

The homestay experience is an excellent way for students to improve their English, learn more about Australian culture and to make the most of their international education experience. It is essential that homestay accommodation is of high quality and provides a safe, comfortable and caring environment.

No more than three international students should be placed in one homestay without the approval of the International Student Services Unit (ISSU). Legal issues may arise where several homestay students are accommodated at one domestic residence, and can contravene a range of Victorian legislation and many local council planning laws.

Homestay host parents must reside in the same building as the international student/s to ensure appropriate supervision.

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Living with an International Student

Host families are encouraged to assist the student's cultural adjustment and support their community and social integration. Australian families with children attending the same school provide an opportunity for the student to develop social relationships and shared experiences that strengthen the homestay relationships and valued cultural experience.

International students studying in the school sector are teenagers, and arriving in a strange country can be a new and daunting experience for them. They will have to adjust to a different lifestyle, food, culture and language and many will also have very high expectations for academic achievement. Students may initially feel homesick or lonely and may show a lack of enthusiasm at times. Tiredness and minor illness is often an initial reaction. To overcome these feelings of cultural dislocation we ask that you are supportive and understanding during this period.

Placement of a Student in Homestay Accommodation

An international student will be carefully matched to a compatible homestay family. Suitability will be determined according to the information provided on the homestay profile.

The International Student Coordinator at the school will contact you as soon as the student's arrival details are finalised. The student will be collected from the airport by a representative from the school and brought to your home. In some cases, homestay families may wish to provide airport support to the student on their arrival and this should be negotiated with the school. Sometimes there may be a delay in the arrival of a student due to the length of time taken to obtain a visa. Please let the International Student Coordinator at the host school know how long you are willing to keep the homestay placement available.

Welfare Responsibilities

In situations where an international student is not able to live with parents or with DHA approved relatives in Victoria, the student's parents request that DET arrange accommodation, support and general welfare for the student.

In these cases, the school organises approved homestay accommodation with a local family (Option 4) or family nominated third party arrangement (Option 3) and manages the day-to-day coordination of student support, accommodation and welfare through the school's International Student Coordinator. The broader oversight of student welfare role is undertaken by the school Principal or Assistant Principal.

Homestay providers need to have an understanding of and acknowledge their obligations under the Child Safe legislation and the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) Reportable Conduct Scheme and will be provided with information and support to meet these obligations by the school.

The International Student Coordinator manages day-to-day support services such as:

- information and advice to students, parents and homestay providers
- homestay accommodation placement and management
- supervision of student reporting and monitoring as required by DET

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- provision of student reports and feedback to parents
- attendance/academic performance issues management

The Principal or Assistant Principal maintains responsibility for all accommodation, support and welfare arrangements for international students at the school. This includes:

- periodic (at least twice yearly) review of accommodation, support and welfare arrangements for all international students
- critical incident management
- liaison with the DET International Education Division (IED) regarding complex or significant international student management matters (eg critical incidents)
- oversight of international student program management
- giving interim consent to medical treatment in emergencies
- dispute resolution where issues relate to homestay or the International Student Coordinator

Note:

Homestay providers are not responsible for the student's overall welfare and any welfare issues concerning the student should be immediately raised with the school's International Student Coordinator or Principal.

Homestay Briefing

Homestay parents along with the host school and DET are required to exercise a duty of care towards international students. It is therefore necessary for homestay families to be provided with an induction program prior to an overseas student and annual training to develop knowledge of:

- the needs of adolescents
- cultural, linguistic and religious differences
- the needs of young people away from their home environment
- Child Safe Legislation and CCYP Reportable Conduct Scheme obligations and procedures
- flexible approaches to matters of discipline, house rules and cooperative living
- What to do if a problem occurs

Working with Children Check

The WWC Check was introduced by the Department of Justice in 2006 and aims to protect children (under the age of 18 years) from sexual and/or physical harm. People who work or volunteer in certain types of child-related work will be required to apply for a WWC Check. The Department of

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Justice has advised the International Education Division that people providing homestay accommodation are required to obtain and maintain a current WWC Check.

Both homestay parents and any permanent resident or Australian citizens over 18 years of age living or frequently residing at the address are required to obtain a WWC Check before any student is placed in their home (this includes any adult children residing at the address). Providers of homestay accommodation and students will be monitored by the school throughout their stay.

More information on the WWC Check can be found at the [Working with Children Check website](#)¹ or from the WWC Check information line 1300 652 879 (local call charge).

Once you have filled in the online application form, you need to go to a [participating Australia Post retail outlet](#)² to lodge your application.

Applications will be receipted, and this receipt must be kept as evidence of submitting an application. There is no fee for volunteers; the Department of Justice has indicated to the International Education Division that homestay providers will be considered “volunteers” for the purpose of the WWC Check.

Applicants will automatically pass the WWC Check if they have no relevant criminal offences and will be issued with a WWC Check Card. This card is valid for five years and lists the applicants name, signature, photograph, expiry date and card type, i.e. voluntary.

International students cannot be placed in a household the WWC card has been issued. Potential host families or existing providers who cannot supply a current WWCC cannot host students under any circumstances.

As a part of the school’s child safe screening of potential homestay hosts, the school will also check the personal identification of homestay providers to confirm their identity and conduct referee checking to confirm suitability for child connected work.

Smoke Alarms

Homestay hosts must be familiar and comply with Melbourne Fire Brigade (MFB) guidelines around installing, operating, testing and maintaining smoke detectors – see the [MFB’s website](#)³.

Cost and Payment Arrangements

The price of homestay accommodation is an amount agreed to by the student’s parents and the homestay provider prior to the commencement of the accommodation arrangement. The cost of homestay may vary between homestay providers depending on the facilities and services offered by the homestay provider as well as the location of the home. Schools can provide guidance on appropriate homestay rates.

¹ <http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/home/applications/lodging+your+application>

² <http://auspost.com.au/>

³ <http://mfb.vic.gov.au/Community/Home-Safety/SmokeAlarms.html>

Payment of homestay fees has to be made by the date specified in the Homestay Responsibility Agreement, which is signed by all parties on the student's arrival. The initial payment should include two weeks' fees in advance plus a bond that is the equivalent of two weeks' fees. The bond is refundable at the conclusion of the homestay period after all expenses, repairs or damage (if any) have been paid. Students and/or their parents are required to reimburse homestay providers for any damage to property (if any) during the student's time of residence.

Schools will collect and manage homestay bonds and will implement an appropriate homestay payment arrangement.

Payment options are as follows:

1. The student's family can choose to pay the entire homestay costs, at the agreed homestay rate, to the school. The school holds this money in trust and pays the agreed homestay rate to the homestay provider fortnightly or monthly.
2. The school can assist the student's parents and the homestay provider to establish a payment method through which the parents pay money directly to the school or homestay provider each fortnight or month.

Note:

Every effort should be made to ensure that homestay accommodation payment methods avoid the student being involved in the transaction.

While there may be circumstances where over 18 year old students are involved in the arrangements for paying for their accommodation, it is important that younger students are not involved in the payment process.

In particular, homestay providers with concerns about payments must not involve the student directly in any discussion or dispute—any matters concerning homestay payments should be resolved between the International Student Coordinator, the student's parents and the homestay provider.

Homestay Responsibility Agreement

The Homestay Responsibility Agreement should set out:

1. The weekly/fortnightly cost of homestay, bond amount, payment arrangements and holiday/return arrangements. Payment of homestay fees has to be made by the date specified in the Homestay Responsibility Agreement, which after discussion, should be signed by the homestay host, the school and the student upon arrival, and by the parents where the student is under 18 years of age. Students under 18 years of age are signing the homestay agreement to acknowledge their being made aware of its content.
2. The obligations and expectations of the homestay provider and the student, including the need for ensuring that the homestay family has in place appropriate insurance coverage (home and content insurance) which recognises that the international student is residing within the homestay premises (covering but not limited to house and contents, personal belongings, damage to property and legal liability coverage).

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On Arrival

Upon the student's arrival, a Homestay Responsibility Agreement between the student and the homestay provider must be signed by both parties. Schools will ensure that the signed agreement clearly specifies the cost, bond, payment, living arrangements and expected standard of behaviour between the parties. The host school will keep the original agreement and provide copies to the student and homestay family.

On arrival, the following will need to be clearly explained to the student as outlined in Homestay Responsibility Agreement for international students:

- house rules
- use of household facilities, such as the washing machine and water use etc.
- making and receiving international calls from home
- internet access and rules

Note:

Telephone and internet expenses are the responsibility of the international student as agreed in Homestay Responsibility Agreement.

Students will need to be provided with a house key.

Homestay families should also be aware of the following:

- Some international students will not be used to doing household chores as they may have had servants in their home.
- Students may not be used to eating a western diet and homestay parents should be aware of any food a student cannot eat due to religious beliefs. Some students are also accustomed to eating a small snack when they come home from school.
- Privacy is important and personal possessions and personal space of students should be respected.

Host families may initially have to explain directions to the school or English Language Centre as well as explain procedures for buying and using a myki card and the location of train, tram and bus stops and timetables. Students will be given an emergency contact card with all relevant contact details upon arrival at the school.

Note:

Your point of contact regarding any issues or concerns is the school's International Student Coordinator (ISC).

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Student Responsibilities

Students should be made aware of their responsibilities which include:

- keeping their bedroom and study area tidy
- keeping other areas of the house tidy after use, including the kitchen, bathroom and toilet
- keeping their valuables and personal possessions safe by placing valuables in a safety deposit box or with the homestay family for safekeeping and not leaving them lying around the house.

Student related issues

Student Attendance and Course progress at School

Homestay parents need to actively monitor student attendance and may be required to write a note of explanation if a student is absent from school for any reason.

All students should be proactively encouraged to attend school and participate in their studies. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) visa regulations allow minimal non-attendance to cover occasional absences and illnesses, including illness supported by a medical certificate.

International students not attending school at least 80% of the time (over a semester) or maintaining satisfactory course progress are in breach of their visa conditions and may face deportation. For students completing VCE, the attendance rate to satisfactorily complete the course may be higher. If you have any concerns over the student's attendance in school, please bring them to the attention of the school's International Student Coordinator.

Illness

All students are required to maintain an Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) policy during their stay in Australia. All overseas students will receive their Medibank Private card and number (if this is their chosen insurer) when they arrive at the school. Students may initially need assistance with making medical and dental appointments. If a student is ill and is not able to attend school the host parent will be required to notify the school.

School Holidays

Students need to inform their school and host family in advance if they are returning home for the school holidays or in limited circumstances, with parental permission, staying with local relatives/friends. If a student is not returning home for the holidays but will be away from the homestay family home the school must be informed and written permission is also required from the student's parents. Suitable arrangements regarding the student's holiday plans should be made prior to the student's departure. Dates of departure and return are at the discretion of the host school's Principal who will take into consideration the attendance requirements mandated under the student's visa conditions.

Going Out

Students will need to ask permission from their homestay family if they wish to go out. For safety reasons students should tell their host family where they are going, with whom, and the expected time of return.

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Please reiterate that students should try to return home by an agreed time. If students think that they will be home later than the agreed time they must ring you and let you know.

Sometimes students may have after-school activities and may be home later than expected. As a matter of courtesy, students must notify you if they will be home late or if they will not be home for dinner. It is reasonable to expect that they should be home at a specified time and you will need to establish appropriate times for them to arrive home on week nights and weekends.

Please remind students of the following for their own safety:

- It is advisable not to carry too much cash or valuables
- It is best to travel in a group whenever possible
- Avoid catching public transport late at night
- Read public transport timetables carefully so as not to miss the last train or tram home
- Avoid risky areas in Melbourne at night

Note:

Homestay host families must notify the school International Student Coordinator if going out arrangements are of concern.

Visitors

Students should ask permission from their homestay family before inviting friends to visit them. Some homestay families may agree to provide meals for friends when given appropriate notice.

Overnight Stay Arrangements

Students must have parental and school permission to stay overnight away from their designated homestay provider, and must provide their homestay host family with the name and contact phone number of the person they are staying with.

Note:

Homestay host families must notify the school International Student Coordinator if overnight stay arrangements are not observed or if overnight stays become frequent or are of concern.

If a student in homestay accommodation leaves without notice or commences staying overnight away from their designated homestay without permission, the homestay provider must report the matter immediately to the school's International Student Coordinator or Principal as this is a breach of the student's visa conditions. A breach of this visa condition is a very serious matter and could result in a students' visa being cancelled and their removal from Australia.

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Monitoring Homestay

Schools will monitor students who are placed in homestay accommodation and maintain regular contact with providers of the accommodation to ensure the students' successful adjustment to life and study in Victoria.

Schools will also conduct an annual review of their homestay providers and inspect the homestay at least twice per year to ensure that student needs are being met. This requirement is in addition to any reviews that may be conducted by a homestay referral service.

Giving Notice

Once a homestay family has been allocated by the school, this family will be reserved for a student. It is therefore expected that a student remain in that accommodation for a reasonable period of time (minimum of three months) before giving notice to move, unless exceptional circumstances occur. If an international student is not happy with the homestay accommodation that has been arranged, they can request that a more suitable one be found. Students will have to give the school and homestay provider at least two weeks' notice if they wish to change homestay. A student who moves without giving two weeks' notice will forfeit their bond.

Alternatively, if a homestay provider wishes to terminate the homestay agreement, the student and the host school must be given at least two weeks' notice and the host school's approval should be sought before proceeding with the termination.

Complaint Procedure

Schools are responsible for resolving any disagreements or disputes that may occur between the student, the student's parents and the homestay family. It is necessary to contact the school if there is any disagreement, dispute, discomfort, danger or concern about the international student.

If the homestay is found to be unsuitable for either party or if there is any danger or a dispute cannot be resolved, it may be necessary to move the student to another homestay provider.

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