

Information for Homestay Providers and Third Parties

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 Early Childhood Development's (DEECD) 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 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.

This accommodation option is also available to families where the parents wish to nominate a specific person (what we call a Third Party) in Victoria to provide accommodation for their child, but where that individual is not a parent or Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) 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 Program Planning and School Support Unit (PPSSU). This includes international students from private providers. 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 at the same address as students.

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 which strengthen their cultural experience.

International students studying in the schools 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. 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

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 DEECD
- provision of student reports and feedback to parents
- critical incident and management
- attendance/academic performance issues.

The Principal or Assistant Principal is responsible for overseeing all accommodation, support and general 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
- liaison with the International Education Division regarding complex or significant international student management matters
- giving interim consent to medical treatment in emergencies
- dispute resolution where issues relate to homestay or the International Student Coordinator
- Signing permission slips for excursions, camps, etc?

Note: Homestay providers are not responsible for the student's overall welfare. Any welfare issues concerning the student should be immediately raised with the school's International Student Coordinator.

Homestay Briefing

Homestay parents along with the host school and the DoE are required to exercise a duty of care towards international students. It is therefore necessary for homestay families to be provided with a briefing program prior to the overseas student arriving at their home. This briefing program will outline the following:

- A knowledge and understanding of the needs of adolescents
- An understanding of cultural, linguistic and religious differences
- An understanding of the needs of young people away from their home environment
- A flexible approach to matters of discipline, house rules and cooperative living
- What to do if a problem occurs.

Working with Children Check

The Working with Children (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 Justice has advised the International Education Division that people providing homestay accommodation will be required to obtain a WWC Check.

Note: Police checks are no longer required for homestay providers. All persons in the homestay over the age of 18 are required to obtain a WWC Check.

The homestay provider will need to complete an application form and submit it to participating Australia Post outlets with:

- Proof of identify
- A passport size photo

Applications will be receipted by Australia Post 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 three years and lists the applicants name, signature, photograph, expiry date and card type, i.e. voluntary.

Further information on the WWC Check can be found at:

www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren or from the WWC Check information line 1300 652 879.

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.

Payment of homestay rent has to be made by the date specified in the Homestay Responsibility Agreement, which is signed by all parties upon the student entering the homestay. The initial payment should include two weeks’ rent in advance plus a bond that is the equivalent of two weeks’ rent. 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 during the student’s time of residence. Except for the bond, any advance payment for homestay accommodation which is not provided to the student must be refunded by the homestay provider.

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 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 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

Payment of homestay has to be made by the date specified in the Homestay Responsibility Agreement, which should be signed by the homestay host, the school and the student after discussion shortly after arrival, and by the parents where the student is under 18 years of age. Students under 18 years of age are signing the Homestay Responsibility Agreement to acknowledge their being made aware of its content.

The Homestay Responsibility Agreement should set out:

1. The weekly/fortnightly cost of homestay, bond amount, payment arrangements and holiday/return arrangements
2. The obligations and expectations of the homestay provider and the student.

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

Note:

1. **Telephone and internet expenses are the responsibility of the international student as agreed in Homestay Responsibility Agreement.**
2. **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 public transport tickets and the location of train, tram and bus stops and timetables. Students will be given a card with all relevant contact details (including your name and contact numbers) upon arrival at the school.

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

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 and not to leave them lying around the house
- placing valuables in a safety deposit box or with the homestay family for safekeeping.
- respecting the property of homestay hosts.

Student related issues

➤ Student Attendance 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.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) visa regulations allow non-attendance for 20% of contact hours 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 term) are in breach of their visa conditions and may face visa cancellation. 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 Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) during their stay in Australia. All overseas students will receive their Medibank Private card and number 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 school and parental permission, staying with local relatives/friends. The following school travel policy applies.

School Travel Policy

- This policy applies to students who have been issued a CAAW letter. The policy does not apply to students residing with a parent or a Department of Immigration and Citizenship approved relative.
- Any trip taken within Victoria or interstate must be done so with the written approval of the student's parent and be endorsed by the school Principal or Assistant Principal. In the case where a student is living in a homestay, the homestay provider should be advised of the arrangements and be provided with details of the student's travel plan.
- Students will be able to travel, subject to the above approvals, in the following circumstances:
 1. The student is travelling with his or her homestay family on a holiday.
 2. The student is travelling on a school camp or excursion supervised by school staff.
 3. The student is travelling with a person (s) approved by the student's school principal holding Police and Working with Children checks.
 4. The student is travelling on a commercial interstate package tour which is provided by a registered company, is specifically designed for students and includes appropriate supervision or chaperone arrangements, and involves no independent travel, i.e. pick up and drop off is at the homestay, the school or an assembly point designated by the school.
 5. The student is travelling in the company of a direct family member over 18 years of age (parent, sibling, aunt/uncle, etc) who will accept responsibility for the student during the travel.
 6. The student is travelling to a sporting or club event as part of a local team or group and will be under the care and supervision of the club or association during the trip. In these circumstances it is expected that students will be supervised at all times by adults who hold the required Police and Working with Children checks.

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 (i.e. the student must be able to maintain attendance of 80% or more).

➤ **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.

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. 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.
- 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.

➤ **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 permission to stay overnight away from their designated homestay provider, and must provide their school 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 student's visa cancellation.

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 the student remain in that accommodation for a reasonable period of time (minimum of three months) before giving notice, 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 want 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.