

Introduction

For the next two or three issues of Educare, we will be sharing the experiences of different parents (mothers) who are homeschooling their children. We hope that this will inspire discussion and response, and we would like to have feedback from others involved in homeschooling. Please write to us!

For the purpose of this article, 'homeschooling' is also taken to include distance learning, a more structured system with online teachers. Family 1's story is on pages 3-5.

As an introduction, I want to give my perspective as a teacher of MKs, based on our experience in Africa of relating to homeschooling families and receiving children who were previously home educated into our school. I observed both plus points and challenges over the years.

Positives

Home schooling may be the best alternative, where the options are limited due to the remoteness of the family's location. If it works well, it keeps the whole family in the ministry location for much longer that would be the case if they decided to move to find a suitable school.

The local school in the host country may be inappropriate for a variety of reasons – atmosphere, ethos, educational style, teaching methods, or the way in which discipline is applied. In this case, home education provides a safer and more positive environment.

Parents have more control over the educational ethos, and can protect their children from indoctrination from secular humanism, political ideology or the local majority religion.

While it is good to shelter children from harmful belief systems, it is also important to equip them to understand different perspectives, especially as they reach secondary age. If this is done from a Biblical perspective it provides a very helpful foundation for the transition to a less sheltered environment.

Learning at home can cement family unity.

In locations where there is limited or no understanding of or provision for special educational needs, children's individual support needs can often be better met at home. Here in the UK, the support system for special educational needs is currently overwhelmed, to the point that home schooling is becoming more and more popular.

Challenges

Home schooling is demanding on parents, and often it becomes one parent's full-time job. It is time-consuming to deliver all of the subjects that the curriculum requires.

Some parents love home schooling, and have many creative ideas to make it work. In other situations, it is difficult to be both parent and teacher. The children can struggle with it too.

It can be quite a juggling act if there are several children at different educational stages. If there are also pre-school children who need to be cared for, there may be a lot of distractions during school time.

Some parents find it hard to enforce a timetable, especially to cover subjects that their children find difficult or don't like. We noticed the effect of this with some homeschooled children. As an example, one child hated maths so she hadn't done much of it. Another child did not complete his homework when recently arrived at the MK school. He glanced at it and decided that he couldn't do it, without trying it. However, where the parents are using a more structured distance-learning programme with teacher input, this is usually less of a problem.

Some children are more sociable than others – in the same family, one child might be quite happy to learn at home on their own or with a brother or sister, whereas another may be desperate for peer group friendships. It is important to ensure that there are regular opportunities for socialising with children of the same age.

Children who have been homeschooled for a long time, and are consequently at least 10 or 11 years old when they arrive at a conventional school, can present as demanding, simply because they have been used to a lot of attention at home, and to receiving parental help as soon as a difficulty arises. In a larger class, children are encouraged to push through and try to find solutions before asking the teacher.

It can be difficult to combine home schooling with ministry.

If children are not adequately taught about different world views, they may not be equipped to understand them or fit them into their 'Christian' system.

Some special needs children need more active intervention that cannot be provided at home.

It can be tempting to choose an inferior programme or curriculum, due to costs or convenience. If the parents' language is not the same as the language of instruction, parents sometimes favour a programme which emphasises rote learning rather than developing thinking skills.

Gill Bryant

Homeschooling – Family 1

The following questions were put to the mother, who was responsible for the home schooling.

What do you feel are the benefits of home schooling?

It's often cheaper than an international school, it allows transitions to be easier, it is Christian value based, you get to spend more time with your children, and you are freer to explore topics or interests of the child more which can encourage their desire to learn.

Are you a trained teacher?

No, I'm a nurse/midwife.

When did you start home schooling, and why?

I started out of necessity with our eldest child because we were living in a small town in Thailand where there were no other viable educational options.

Please explain where you were or are when home schooling – overseas or in your passport country.

I have home schooled both overseas and in my passport country.

Which curriculum did you use for primary school?

I used WES (Worldwide Education Services <https://www.weshome.com/>) and a variety of other sources found online. WES is based on the English National Curriculum.

Which curriculum do you use for secondary school?

I use WES for years 7 and 8 and then after that I use IGCSE curriculum/books.

How do the costs compare with sending your children to a school overseas?

I have found it a lot cheaper, but it depends on what resources/curriculum you use. I re-used the same curriculum for most of my children. Some families home schooling today use online lessons for certain subjects, but this does significantly increase costs.

How many children have you home schooled in the past?

Six children, but only four at a time.

How many are you teaching now?

Two children

How much time do the children spend each day doing home schooling?

This has varied depending on the year or grade of the children. When they were reception – year 3/4, they only had school in the morning. As they got older the school day gradually lengthened to reach the same amount of time as a normal school day. The only difference is that I rarely need to set homework.

What were the challenges of teaching Early Years – (age 4-7) Key Stage One?

A lot of one-on-one teaching. Balancing the care of toddlers/pre-school children while teaching.

What were the challenges of teaching age 7-11 – Key Stage Two?

Trying to get them to work more independently and not to stop working every time I went out of the room or had visitors!

What are the challenges of teaching age 11-14 – Key Stage Three?

When I was abroad it was often difficult to access materials for practical lessons, especially chemistry.

What are the challenges of teaching GCSEs?

Struggling to teach subjects that I am weaker at, especially when the child has difficult questions. Getting too exam focused rather than education focused.

How do you manage when you are teaching children who are at different levels? Do they all work independently, or can you sometimes get them to work together?

They work independently at various times during the day. For older children, I set work the night before and mark it at a set time during the day. I have taught two children close in age together for many subjects and sometimes even four children but with differentiating work and expectations.

What do you enjoy about home schooling?

The flexibility – having time off when we want to, taking a holiday during term time, no homework!

How did your children respond to it? Were they different?

Yes, when my eldest reached early teens, he was missing peer competition, and so I didn't think that he did his best with his class work. Shortly after this, we returned to the UK, and he went to a small Christian school where he seemed to thrive better. All the other children have

enjoyed the flexibility and less pressure of homeschooling. One wanted to go to school but due to a chronic health condition he couldn't. Our youngest, who is adopted, has only been home schooled for a few months while we made a transition. We feel that going to a school is the best choice for her currently.

What do you do if a child loves one subject but hates another?

I acknowledge it but say that it is on their timetable and so they still have to spend the set allocated time on it!

How did you assess the children's progress?

They have taken SAT tests (British progress tests) for Key Stages 1,2 and 3. They have also taken Richmond tests (an older testing scheme) and MAP tests, an American testing system.

How do you ensure that they have opportunities to socialise with other children?

When we lived in a small town in Thailand, they played with local Thai children in the neighbourhood most days. They also got to attend regular organized meetups with other MKs. When we lived in a city in Thailand, they attended a Christian home school co-op and were able to attend after school activities at the international school for missionary children. When we home schooled in the UK, they had friends at church and youth group, at a home school co-op and at any after school activities that they did.

Do you have tips and advice for other parents doing home schooling?

Have fun and enjoy it!

Do you have any regrets, or anything that you might do differently if you had an opportunity to do it again?

Yes, I regret not being better prepared for lessons. I regret getting too stressed about the children's level or attainment and not realising that there is more to life than education!

How have your older children managed the change from home schooling to conventional school/college/university/the world of work?

Our eldest two children transitioned to a Christian school in their teens, one transitioned to an international school for years 12 and 13 (US Grades 11 and 12) and one transitioned straight to university. The eldest two struggled initially with having deadlines for work and having to get work completed within a set time. However, they all found that having worked independently in home school helped them to transition well to college and university.

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