

We Lock Our Kids Away From Society in Schools ... Prisoners of the System

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A CHILD'S school days stay with them forever - whether it is a loathing of double maths or a love of experiments in the science lab.

But an increasing number of Midland children are being kept out of the state system and taught at home by one or both parents.

Figures released last year by local authorities show a 60 per cent rise in the number of children being home educated in recent years.

Government statistics state there are around 30,000 children who are now taught away from school across Britain.

And it is believed around 6,000 of these are from the Midlands.

Many youngsters are removed from school as a result of bullying or due to the needs of learning difficulties not being met.

But parents are increasingly forgoing formal education in favour of teaching their offspring at home from birth.

Lena Anderson, from Rugby, Warwickshire, decided she was going to teach her boys, Ethan, two, and Sean, five, at home before they were born.

The 33-year-old, whose partner Kevin Fitzalan, 33, works in the financial industry in London, said she doesn't trust the modern academic system because she believes it restricts children's personal development.

"It is mainly because I do not agree with the way education is portrayed to children," she said.

Talents "It is because schools and the Government are more concerned with pleasing the parents and less about letting children find their own interests and talents.

"I did not realise until I was older that you do not have to be great at geography, and maths and science, and enjoy sports day.

"Our children are the most vulnerable part of our society, and yet we lock them away from society in these educational institutions.

"We suppress their natural desire to explore and learn in favour of a rigid curriculum that makes them a prisoner of their own education instead of an interested participant.

"Schools at 16 still want children to put their hand up when they want to go to the toilet, which is a basic human function.

"Then they let the children leave into an adult world and expect them to have an adult's understanding of the world, which they don't."

Lena said she believes children can learn life skills more readily in a more natural environment rather than the institutionalised setting of a classroom.

"My children are both learning all the time and they are free to do what interests them," she said.

"Sean will use maths if he goes to the shop with me and buys a lolly, I will expect him to work out how much money he needs.

"From birth I have been teaching them things. You teach them to read and words. It is not formal teaching but you are helping them learn, it was just for fun really.

"I do not have to teach Sean because he is learning all the time, I facilitate his learning.

"The more I look into it the more I realise I do not have to sit him down to teach him.

"The funniest thing he found out was that a crab eats and goes to the toilet from the same place."

Many youngsters who are educated at home start learning in the state system, but are removed from it due to problems with bullying or special educational needs.

Parents have a right to pull their children out of school but must show to their local authority proof an education is being delivered to the child.

And they can join a number of support groups set up to help home educators.

The most popular of these is Education Otherwise.

Julie Bunker, 49, from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire is a Midland representative for the organisation and taught all three of her children at home.

The former ward sister said: "They were not being appreciated properly by the school and they were unhappy.

"There was bullying and a degree of dyslexia.

"We found out about home education and it has been fabulous.

"It was definitely the right option for us. Some people say they are concerned their youngsters will become isolated if they do not attend school. But this certainly wasn't the case for us.

"We discussed it with the children beforehand so it was not something we forced on them.

"I have never had any regrets.

"People think there is this stereotype of children sitting at home alone all day. Some people do that but other home educators have an autonomous style.

"They have a social life that is the envy of all their friends.

"All three have said they are going to use home education when they have children.

"In my experience it creates very successful happy young people who are a pleasure to be a round."

WHAT THEY DO

EACH day of Ethan and Sean's home education is different to the next. Mum Lena Anderson explains the type of activities they get up to: "To be honest no day is really the same, as I follow their lead. But here's a rough outline of the kinds of things we do."

9am: Get up see what the weathers doing.

10am: Wander downstairs and have breakfast in our bed clothes and start drawing or playing a game.

11am: If it is sunny we might make a quick plan to go to Hatton Park Farm.

12.30pm: Back from our trip Sean will usually ask to do something he's interested in. This week it has been learning to ride his bike.

1.30pm: Come in from bike practice and have lunch.

2.30pm: Spend time doing dot-to-dots, learning to count to 100.

3.30pm: Complete jigsaw of the British Isles and find out where grandma and grandad live.

5pm: Sean loves building incredibly complex tracks for his trains and his dad often helps him with these. Ethan will be learning shapes and colours from the Spot books.

6.30pm: Play hangman on the chalk board in the kitchen while mum makes tea.

7pm: Bedtime with a story.

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