

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN APPLICATION UNSCHOOLING 2014

The special needs of both children and the subsequent approach we are taking with their homeschooling make it extremely difficult to answer the questions on the form as written. The following addresses the reason for homeschooling, what our approach will be and our method of assessment and record keeping.

REASONS FOR HOMESCHOOLING

■■■■■■ have both been diagnosed with ■■■■■■. Their IQ assessments indicate high levels of ability across some areas, in the very superior range, and others in the Average range. Their abilities are so asynchronous as to make a composite IQ score impossible, and this wide variance in abilities means that a traditional learning environment cannot provide for their educational needs. They both have ongoing therapy with Psychology, OT, and Speech Pathology which takes up a good chunk of each week.

■■■■ attended an independent school until early in Year 2 and had many difficulties, which worsened significantly as he got older. He was unable to focus on any work and was rarely able to complete tasks. He was working at significantly below his ability, and his ability in some learning areas was significantly above his year level. He experienced a high degree of anxiety in a daily basis, was subjected to bullying and received no support from the school.

At the end of Term 1 last year we removed him from the school and enrolled with the Open Access College, where he was immediately advanced a year level into Year 3. After 6 months he went into year 4, whilst also doing Year 5 Maths. While his experience with the OAC was definitely a huge improvement it still could not meet his special needs, both educationally and with respect to his medical conditions. He was psychologically doing much better than at his previous school and was actually able to learn in the home environment, but the workload was far more than he could handle and was either far too easy for him or was too hard, again because of his widely asynchronous abilities. He struggled with the time it took him to complete assignments and this eventually became a source of extreme anxiety for him and a great stress on our family.

We realised that even with an NEP there was only so much accommodation that could be made within the school system and that the combination of giftedness, medical conditions, and his therapy commitments meant that we were always going to be trying to fit a square peg in a round hole. He needs the complete flexibility that an unschooling approach can provide so we can tailor his learning to his ability in each learning area, while maintaining an environment that supports his special needs.

■■■■ has been assessed as having Very Superior skills in some areas and below average in others. The work she was being given with OAC was well below her abilities and we found we had to adapt the assignments constantly to her level of competency. The way we had to approach her learning was pretty much re-writing the lesson plans very week, doing even more work than we would have to do if we were homeschooling. The online lessons were a waste of her time because she learnt nothing in them and she struggled with maintaining focus and with being able to communicate due to anxiety. We feel that she is far better served by homeschooling where we

can tailor her learning to her specific needs and interests, and inculcate a desire to learn. The school system was killing her interest in learning.

PROGRAM OF WORK

Homeschooling for both of them will be a process of following their lead and using their interests, their play and the normal events of life as teachable moments, with a wide variety of resources available to them to pursue any interest. It will also include following on with their therapy goals, which are essential to support their learning. We will be taking an "unschooling" approach, rather than having a set daily schedule or set program of activities. Enforced study times and "lessons" just don't work for them. Both children learn best when it comes naturally as part of daily experience or conversation rather than a set time to "sit down and learn". As an example, some of their best learning has happened during conversations at bedtime. Today we used Minecraft as a tool to teach rounding figures, division, methods of data recording, and translating that data to mapping as he recreated our house exactly in the Minecraft world. As an adjunct to homeschooling we are continuing with their enrolment in Japanese with the OAC.

The children's interests are varied. [REDACTED] interests include; Lego, Indigenous Australian history and culture, Japanese (both the language and the culture), Maths, writing books, fantasy art, movie-making, mapping, Minecraft, geology, dinosaurs, mythology, marine life, remote control vehicles, computer programming, archery, bushwalking, Magic the Gathering card game, environmentalism, social justice, and fantasy literature. [REDACTED] interests include; Lego, art, story writing, fantasy role playing, Minecraft, maths, geology, and Japanese.

Due to the children's varied and asynchronous abilities across learning areas, the learning program will naturally be individualised and not taught at a specific year level. We will be taking a thematic approach with various curriculum areas integrated into a particular unit of study. For example, [REDACTED] is interested in marine life. The learning areas that we can cover within that theme would include biology, science inquiry skills, life cycles, environmental issues, history, importance of marine life in different cultures, and literacy skills such as report writing and persuasive writing.

[REDACTED] has already surpassed the achievement standard for many areas at Foundation level. She will, however, require more structure in her learning program than [REDACTED] while she acquires the basic language, literature and literacy skills. Numeracy will be incorporated within other areas of interest, for example: building with Lego uses many mathematical concepts that can be explicitly discussed during her play. She has passion for rock collecting, and pursuing that interest can encompass math concepts (grouping, size, weight); science (learning to classify objects based on observations, understanding geology, use of a microscope); art (drawing or painting gemstones); and health and p.e. (visiting historical mines and going rock hunting).

RESOURCES

We will use a large and varied selection of resources. The children both have their own computers and share an iPad. We have registered with Home Education Australia and will continue to use Mathletics and Studyladder. We have an extensive collection of non-fiction books encompassing a very wide range of subject matter. Both children love visiting the SA Museum and the Art Gallery regularly, and we are members of the Adelaide Zoo which we visit frequently. We utilise websites such as Khan Academy and use YouTube, ABC iView and SBS OnDemand for educational programs

and documentaries (they both love David Attenborough). We attend science fairs, the Adelaide Planetarium, the local library and cultural events such as the Medieval Fair. We take field trips and short holidays to experience things like whale watching at Victor Harbor or a nature walk in the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens. We also go Geocaching.

LONG TERM GOALS

We intend to homeschool both children for at least the Primary years. Following that we will continue to homeschool if it is in the children's best interests to do so. Our priority is to provide them with the best possible education and that requires constant monitoring of their needs and adjusting our approach accordingly. By the end of their Secondary education we want them to have an appropriate skill set to be able to engage in a meaningful way in society and to pursue whatever dreams they may have for their lives.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Our focus will be on their steady development. We will keep records to track their progress over time, and periodically assess their performance against the ACAS.

Record keeping will include:

- keeping a regular journal noting activities, which curriculum areas they covered, how well they responded to the activity, what was learnt, and feedback from the children;
- taking video and photos of the activities;
- keep a portfolio or folder of artwork and any special written work;
- using Evernote to save websites we use as resources, and to share videos, photos, and work completed.