

for lessons in life

Jayne's children take control and study in their own time

MOTHER-of-four Jayne Roscamp is happy to describe herself as a 'maverick' - she strongly believes children should grow up in a state of freedom, unrestricted by the rules and regulations of normal school.

Although only 32, Jayne seems to embody the idealism some might associate with the hippy ethos of the 1960s.

She decided to eschew home education when her eldest child Lily, now 11, was only a two-year-old.

"I decided it was a really good idea that a child should learn at its own pace," she said.

"I'd met someone who told me about a support group - I'd never heard of such a thing before, I didn't know it was an option," she said at the family home in Worksop Road, Swallowstone.

"I had two years to plan and prepare, and I was keen that Lily should learn in her own way, like she had learned to walk and talk.

"I began to see it as a way of life - I've no plans for any of my children to go to school. They'll only do that if they want to do so."

Neither Jayne or her husband Andrew have any teaching background - instead, Jayne says, "the kids take control".

"I provide what they ask for, I never try to impose anything. Barnaby is five and is learning to read, but it's all done in his own time.

"The children have different interests - I don't think of them as subjects. We don't follow a curriculum because we don't have to. And we have no contact with the local authority - they're only in touch if they know about you and we're not in the system at all."

But will the Roscamp children ever pass any qualifications?

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Perhaps they will take some GCSEs, if they are still around by then,



Write on: Jayne Roscamp with her children Freddy, Barney, Sol and Lily

Picture: Steve Parkin

and haven't been totally devalued," Jayne said.

"Lily could go to college or take courses online - there are lots of different avenues around."

Jayne rejects the notion that her children may not be equipped to deal with the real

world. Home educated children get more involved with their own community than any schoolkids do.

They talk to adults all the time, they are meeting all sorts of people of all ages, mixing freely at a variety of social events. In many ways it

is community-based education.

"My daughter has friends who go to school and she doesn't envy them. I believe education happens all the time - it's about making the most of the natural curiosity of children."

No set timetables and no isolation

EIGHT-year-old Niall Egan is into bugs and creepy-crawlers.

He loves looking for them in the garden of his home in Cannonthorpe Rise, Treeton, looking under leaves, searching behind rocks.

So his mum Louise has made a project out of it - encouraging Niall to list and classify what he finds, as a doorway into science and natural history studies.

That's the way things are with many children who are educated at home.

They don't follow set timetables, take tests at the ages of seven, 11 and 14, and they rarely get involved with the National Curriculum. And that's the way their parents like it.

Niall and his six-year-old sister Cara have both had experience of conventional

schooling but when the family moved to Hereford, they didn't settle at their new primary.

When they moved back to the Rotherham area, the children's original school was full, and Louise and her husband Gavin - himself a teacher - weren't impressed with the alternatives.

"And so in May this year, we made the decision to do it ourselves," said Louise, whose own background is in medicine.

"It was a big decision to make. We read up about it in books and on parenting websites on the net, which led us to home education sites."

Louise is careful to make sure Niall and Cara receive plenty of tuition in literacy and numeracy - but in other areas the children are encouraged to explore their interests.

"Often we all work together on projects, such as arts and crafts, and recently we've been writing poems for Halloween," Louise said.

"They are enjoying learning, they seem happier and are less stressed - and I enjoy it too. Niall asks things, such as about Russian history and so we end up learning together."

One understandable issue for parents going down this route is what are dubbed 'socialisation issues' - making sure their youngsters have plenty of contact with other children.

With three younger sisters, all under five, Niall and Cara are hardly going to be isolated at home.

But Louise and Gavin soon discovered there was an active South Yorkshire network of similar families, which

arranges a variety of get-togethers from mornings at IceSheffield to walks in the Shire Brook Valley.

Of course, these are as important for the parents as they are for the children, to compare notes and progress.

The fact that Gavin himself is a teacher could be seen by some as a vote of no confidence in the education system as a whole, but Louise denies this is the case.

"Gavin teaches in a secondary school, and for the moment we've only decided to teach our children ourselves during the primary years. When Niall is 11, we'll decide what to do from there - we're not saying he won't go back into organised schooling.

"But so far things are working well and we're happy with the way things are going."

If you've got views on the news we want to hear them!

Understanding law on home education

MANY thanks for your article on home education. Many more people should now be aware of this option. Such a shame that the City Council spokesman mis-states the law. His statement that 'if a family is not on the register that is unlawful...' is simply wrong. Home visits are not compulsory either.

For a proper understanding of the law please contact Education Otherwise at www.education-otherwise.org

Your newspaper has highlighted the need for better training of council officers and councillors on this area of the law.

Annette Taberner, Nether Edge, Sheffield

Illuminations 'celeb' doesn't turn me on

MEADOWHALL always has a celebrity to turn on their Christmas lights, last year it was Jordan and Peter Andre. But this year we are told it will be Louis Walsh. Sorry but as a crowd pulling celebrity he does not have the X Factor.

Mrs D Hakala, Skyedge Avenue, Sheffield 2

Action call to affordable ho

SHEFFIELD desperat a building program affordable rented pro What we are getting i demolition of council

Demolition might n serious if it was stmp of older or difficult-to stock being replaced v council homes. But th what we are getting, 7 majority of the land v council houses once s be sold off to private developers who will b £100,000-plus homes f lucky enough to be ab afford them.

Five years ago Briau of Shirecliffe said th would happen and he w plans prove that he w

Labour will say th for more council hous "unrealistic" under e (New Labour) Govern rules, and cite this as for undoing 60 years o by previous Labour administrations in bu council housing.

What is "unrealistic refusing to acknowledge scale of the housing c city now faces.

Ben Morris, Sheff County

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★ The Star

OPINION

Patients caught in the middle

REFORMS to one man are redundancies to another. And when these terms are applied to the health service, there is a danger they become cut-backs for patients. That is one potential which, clearly, everyone will try to evade, as Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust shave £50 million from its wages bill over the next three years, along with a further £40 million of cuts.

Managers are instructed to look carefully at vacancies which come along, to see if working practices can be changed to make sure delivery to patients can be achieved by non-traditional means. But the emphasis is on saving money. And experience shows that when a balance sheet is the ultimate deciding factor, economies rather than efficiencies are sought. Meanwhile, a war of words will blur reality as unions battle for jobs and managers struggle to achieve cuts - and the patient is left hoping against the odds that his or her treatment will not be affected.

Chance of a lifetime for your children

WHEN officials from the local education authority wrote in our columns that parents who kept their children off school were doing them a disservice, they had not meant to point the finger of blame at one group of mums and dads - the home educators. These are parents who believe they can give their children a better start in life by teaching them at home. Tonight we show why these dedicated and gifted parents really can give their children a tremendous boost on the road to adulthood.

But the fact remains that they are in the minority. For the majority, school is the only option. And those who actively encourage their youngsters to stay at home are depriving their children of a once in a lifetime chance of education.

For real, it's Santa!

PARENTS are blamed for their children growing up too soon and leaving innocence behind. This need to succeed as early as possible in the classroom means children leave behind concepts such as the tooth fairy by the age of six, new research shows. Come December, though you can bet there'll be plenty of youngsters who believe in Santa Claus!

TONIGHT'S QUESTION

Q: SHOULD more parents be encouraged to teach their children at home? SEE STORY PAGE 8-9

HAVE YOUR SAY

If you agree vote YES

If you disagree vote NO

To join our vote log on to www.sheffieldtoday.co.uk or vote by text message. Text STARVOIE, followed by a space and your answer, YES/NO and send to 84070. Texts cost 25p plus standard network rates. If you do not want to receive details on any other products or services, please text the word EXIT at the end of your message.

LAST NIGHT'S RESULT

Q: IS Brian Law the man to bring back the glory days to Sheffield Wednesday?

YES 22% NO 78%

www.sheffieldtoday.co.uk

Home sweet home



Great outdoors: Alison Blain learns about nature with daughters Elizabeth, Lucy, Felicity and family friend Becky Thomas

Picture: Barry Richardson

Many people believe children have to be sent to school every day - and families which fail to do so can find themselves in serious trouble with the authorities. But it is perfectly legal to educate your child in your own home, in your own way. Education Correspondent Mike Russell met several South Yorkshire parents who have chosen to opt out of the system.

SHEFFIELD education experts agreed that Alison and Colin Blain should teach their eldest son John at home.

As he had Down's Syndrome and then developed leukaemia at the age of three, it was decided that was the option that made most sense.

But the couple have decided their three daughters, Elizabeth, Lucy and Felicity, should be taught in the same way at their home in

Landwood Grove, Hackenthorpe.

"It fitted us all so well - it was important that the girls should spend time with their brother

"It was important the girls spent time with their brother before he died"

Alison Blain

before he died, which he did when he was 10," Alison said.

"It helped us learn how children develop. We also wanted keep the girls together, making education a

family affair. At home I believe children are more ready and eager to learn and try new things - they are enthused by life, whereas conventional education is all about making kids conform. School is about delivering a curriculum, not true learning."

Alison said her girls learned different things at different rates, proving the futility of age-related testing.

"It's extraordinarily difficult to shape a system that is fit for every child - it can't suit every child all of the time," she said.

"Our choice does mean though we are living on one income - lots of holidays, new cars and so on, it just doesn't happen."

Alison said she would encourage her daughters to take A-levels and go to university if that is what they wanted, but there were many other alternatives such as vocational qualifications.

"There's a wrong impression that home educated children are just sat at a table at home all the time, but there's plenty of social contact. Elizabeth for example regularly helps out at a toddler group," she said.

"My advice would be, if you think this might be right for you, then just do it. You learn as you go along. The network of parents is important, some days you throw a wobbly and you need support. But it is an adventure, all the way."

Children more ready and eager to learn when it's a family affair says mum Alison

120 families register preference for home education

OFFICIALLY there are around 120 home educating families in Sheffield - they are the ones the local authority knows about, anyway.

Parents have the legal responsibility to ensure their children are being educated effectively, whether at a state or independent school, or at home.

A family should inform the council if home education is the path they are taking, and extra

support is available if required through a home schooling service.

"We have a duty of care to ensure all children are receiving a broad and balanced education," said Paul Makin, the Children's Service's director of local delivery.

"If a family is not on the register that is unlawful and also unhelpful to the child. We have to make sure the child's needs are being cared for."

A family will be visited annually and it is accepted that home provision may be very flexible and very varied.

And while qualifications are deemed important, it's accepted that they are only one facet of education.

"The vast majority of provision from parents is judged to be OK - but if we are not happy then we offer support through agencies and teaching materials," Paul said.

"In extreme cases, if we find the education inadequate, we can restrict a child to be sent to school. And if that doesn't happen then we would take legal proceedings as in other cases of non-attendance.

"Children educated at home can reach very high standards, but it is an immense commitment for a family and we do need to ensure that that decision is right for the child," Paul added.