



Home Education South West Newsletter

March 2010

Hi All,

This edition is full of the usual features; articles, what's on, HE news, LA update, free stuff, product review and website resources.

We hope you find it useful.

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Alternative View

'Pulling away from the pack'



The best state schools are "pulling away from the pack", according to Sue Fieldman of the Good Schools Guide. She told the BBC that the few, very best state schools were pulling away from the "bog standard comprehensives". However, she did feel it necessary to point out that although the state schools that are in the guide are good, they can never rival the private/independent schools, mainly due to factors which state schools will never have, namely "small class size" and "super facilities".

27% of schools in the guide are from state sector (50 of which are academically selective), leaving 73% from the private sector. Yet in the UK, independent schools only account for a "tiny proportion" (6.5%) of children at school. So proportionally only a very tiny number of state schools are good enough to appear in the guide.

So what makes the top state schools so good?

Well according to Alice Hudson, Head teacher of Twyford Church of England School which appears in the guide, the "home factor makes a tremendous amount of difference". Those state schools that are top of the range have "parents who want to get involved" and provide "all round education". She further emphasised that "engaging parents makes all the difference to a school doing well".

Areas that were identified as causing "challenges" which affect the state schools' ability to deliver excellence were "the range of students, social issues and SEN issues". Basically schools find it difficult to help students reach their full learning potential if the children have different intellectual ability or if they come from deprived backgrounds, minority backgrounds or have special educational needs.

Educational excellence is a personalised all round education with high parental engagement. Sound familiar?

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What's on

www.wilderwoods.org - Somerset

Wilder woods has several sessions this month:

Woodland Toys Project for 11- 19yr+, takes place on 2 consecutive Saturdays March 6th & March 13th. Green woodworking skills to make simple toys for young children.

Volunteer Day at Hallr Wood, Charlton Mackrell join in with woodland management tasks March 7th

Overnight Bushcraft for 13 years+ opportunity to learn wilderness and survival skills March 19th

Check out their website for more details.

[Killerton](#) - National Trust property, Exeter



Several events are hosted this month at Killerton including an 'Elegance' Historic Fashion Exhibition and 'Drop in' Guided Garden Walks (at no additional charge).

[Studland walk: Greenlands to Goathorn](#)

A look at the variety of landscape within the Studland Peninsula: from the heathland and farming to forestry and the clay industry.

Product review



[Bananagrams](#)

A bit like scrabble, only quicker to play and much more portable as you don't need a board. We found it great fun and enjoyable for the whole family (6 - 68yrs) to play together. Each player can play to their own ability and you don't have to wait for your turn as all the players play at the same time.

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H.E. News

'Home education under attack'

Maybe we should draw strength from the fact that Ed Balls and his propaganda machine feel the need to stoop so low as to use the tragic death of Khyra Ishaq to further attack and discredit home educators.

Maybe we should expect nothing less from a Government campaign that started out with spurious allegations by Baroness Morgan that HE could be used as a cover for abuse.

All through this campaign the Government has been manipulating the so called statistics, investigation and evidence data collected by the far from 'independent' review to work towards a desired legislative outcome. In short, by whatever means Ed Balls wants to get our home

educated children under state control and monitoring.

Educational provision and welfare issues should not be conflated.

The tragic case of Khyra and her siblings is not a home education issue and no change to legislation governing HE would have saved her. But, perhaps she could have been saved if social services had not failed to carry out their duty. Despite what the media reports, the Judges ruling of the case reflects this conclusion. These are quotes directly from the ruling:

"The schools did all they could to bring their concerns to the attention of the relevant authorities. These concerns were not taken sufficiently seriously and were not adequately investigated."

"It seems extraordinary to me that no alarm bells rang with social services..."

"The school drew social services' attention to the family the day after the mother withdrew them from school. No professional person, whether teacher or social worker saw the children after February 2008 and no-one tried to see them."

"Put at its baldest, at the very least a proper initial assessment should have been completed."

"on the evidence before the court I can only conclude that in all probability had there been an adequate initial assessment and proper adherence by the educational welfare services to its guidance, K would not have died."

Concerns for the children's welfare was raised while they were still at school and after, yet still social services did not use their powers to intervene.

Ed Balls is putting other children at risk by not addressing the real issue in this case; namely that there was a failing in the social services department in understanding their powers and carrying out the required procedure in order to protect Khyra and her siblings. Continuing down his road to change EHE legislation, muddying education and welfare together, is only going to make it harder for LAs to identify real cases of concern.

LA update

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[Dorset EHE team](#) have invited home educators to attend an HE network event on the 17th March. The meeting will cover 'internet safety' and 'gifted & talented opportunities' and offer "an opportunity for discussion with Dorset's EHE team." Application in advance is essential.

Ken Stevenson (Dorset EHE lead) seems genuinely keen to start having constructive dialogue with Dorset families in order to improve relations and support.

The offer of 'e-safety' and 'G & T support' demonstrates their intention to offer support/resources. However LAs don't seem to understand that home educators do not want LAs to decide/guess/offer what *they think* we might want – I think e-safety is pretty low down on our list of support needs! We need to get across to LAs that however good their intentions are, any workshops that they offer are going to be poorly attended if it is they that decide the theme.

Dorset's first network meeting should have just offered an open forum to give home educators an opportunity to voice what it is that they actually need in terms of support.

On the application form to attend there is a box to tick whether you are registered or not.

LAs are definitely being leaned on to have a better awareness of how many EHE families are in their areas. The subject comes up time and time again at Westminster that MPs, DCSF etc. are shocked and surprised that LAs cannot tell them how many EHE children there are.

Call me cynical, but personally I think this is an ideal opportunity for Dorset to start getting a better idea of how large its EHE community is. If you give them your name and tick the non-registered box, I do not believe at this time that you will automatically start being hassled to register, but to all intents and purposes that is what you will have done – you will be on file. If the new DCSF Bill is voted in, thereby changing the law, there will be compulsory notification/registration/monitoring of EHE. With your name on file, it will be harder to make a stand against this legislation should you want to do so.

Despite good intentions to offer better services, like most LA officers, Ken will probably not see registration as a problem ('we just want to help you, but we need to know who you are first' mentality). As a community we need to get across to them that they are our public servants, we know how to contact them should we need to and they should do their best to support us with no strings attached.

Free Stuff

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[Family Connections](#)

From 2009 until 2012, a range of activities exploring communication and digital media will be taking place in Somerset, thanks to The Big Lottery and other supporters. Activities are FREE



[Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre](#)

The picturesque sea side village of Charmouth is located on the World Heritage Site Jurassic Coast. The beaches around Charmouth are world famous for the amazing fossils that can be found washed out of the cliff.

ENTRY TO THE CENTRE IS FREE

Website resources

[Up to Ten](#) - over a 1000 educational games & activities for children aged up to 10 yrs old!

[Masterminding molecules](#) - win the race to discover a new life-saving drug!

[Language 'steps'](#) - online 12 week language courses from the BBC

[Incompetech](#) - free online graph paper/grid paper

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