Homeschooling

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By Nicole Lee

Just imagine a school where there are no uniforms, report cards, parent teacher interviews or after school detentions.

That's the case at the Giotopoulos-Moore household, where mother Xan conducts homeschooling for her two kids, eleven-year-old Kassandra and eight-year-old Davis.

Xan has taken on the role of teacher, principal, curriculum organiser and canteen worker with relish, however she hasn't always been a convert to the idea of home based education.

"I knew somebody who did homeschooling and I remember thinking, 'Oh my goodness I could never be one of those people,'" says Xan.

Homeschooling soon became an option when Xan started to question the lifestyle that school hours imposed on the family.

"The more I thought about it the more I realised I had a choice... it wasn't about being anti establishment and it wasn't about not liking school. It was more about choosing how we'd like to conduct our life day to day and actually being with the kids a bit more and having a family life."

A regular day for the Giotopoulos-Moore family starts and finishes early. Maths, English and science are studied after breakfast using a range of resources. Greek and French is studied using a computer program. For music, Kassandra learns the harp and Davis the violin.

While the regular school student perseveres until around 3.30 in the afternoon, homeschooling is usually finished by lunch. Mother Xan, says that is one of the benefits of learning from home.

"One of the reason we're always finished by lunch is because with one on one the minute my daughter says 'Mum I'm stuck in maths' I run over and I quickly check to make sure she's alright and guide her through the problem. So she progresses through her lessons fast and doesn't wait for everyone to understand in the class before she moves to the next topic."

Having been homeschooled since grade two, Kassandra is the only child in the family who has had a taste of the classroom, but says she enjoys the flexibility of learning from home with her brother.

"I like it because you don't have to have lunch when the bell rings. I also like it because you don't have to do things at exactly one time every day," says Kassandra.

The homeschooling community in Alice Springs is fairly close knit. Eleven-year-old Kassandra has around ten friends who have rejected the uniforms, timetables and multiple teachers for the kitchen table and home computer.

So what's it like having your mum as a teacher? Kassandra is more diplomatic than most eleven year olds about the question.

"Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad."

However, school isn't just about an academic education. The skills picked up in the playground are often just as important as those in the classroom. Xan says the first question she often gets asked about home schooling is regarding socialisation. She says this is the biggest worry for parents considering teaching from home.

"I think any well rounded child can adapt to anything and to think that they wouldn't is to almost be limiting their abilities. They're involved in so many activities a lot of their friends are school friends... I often hear this toughen them up attitude but I think mothers are stricter anyway."

While the kids might embrace the homeschooling option, not all parents can feel confident with the responsibility of their child's education. Xan, however, believes most parents are naturally qualified to teach their own children.

"You don't need a qualification to teach your children. You're with your children for the first five years of their life and you watch them you watch the way they learn, you watch the way they behave. So you are really an expert on your child between zero and five."

"There's this misconception that at five we hand over our children thinking that we can't possibly have the ability to teach them when in fact you know them inside and out. So you're probably best informed on how they learn."