

# 'I teach my eight kids at home'

Most women breathe a sigh of relief when the children are packed off to school in the morning. But for mum-of-nine Margaret-Rose White, 35, her work is just beginning...

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**H**aving nine kids to look after would be more than enough work for most

mums. So when former nanny Margaret-Rose White decided that she'd teach all her kids at home, instead of sending them to school, there were a few raised eyebrows.

'At first neighbours, friends and grandparents were sceptical,' recalls Margaret-Rose. 'They didn't even think it was legal, didn't know anyone else who taught their children at home and thought I wouldn't be able to cope.'

But through incredible teamwork and organisation, the unconventional system is working for the huge family, who live in a thatched, 17th-century farmhouse near Exeter.

'Some people think it's like something out of *The Sound Of Music*, but there's a lot of hard work that goes on behind the scenes,' says Margaret-Rose. 'This isn't a hobby. I'm qualified as a childminder and a nursery nurse, so this is a career for me. I don't have any regrets or feel like I'm missing out by teaching the kids at home.'

Although schooling hours are flexible, Margaret-Rose sticks to a 'school day' of learning that starts when the kids get up and finishes when they have done all their assigned tasks.

The children follow a curriculum designed for home-teaching, which is based on continuous assessment, and is affiliated to the Christian Education Europe organisation. The local education authority visits once a year to inspect the family's progress and to check each child is learning well.

Margaret's husband, Fred, 36, acts as headmaster, ordering books, giving out assessments and presenting congratulation slips and coloured stars to the kids for good results.

## Home help

And while Elizabeth, 14, Abigail, 12, Peninnah, nine, Jesse, eight, Susanna, seven, Barnabas, five, Josiah, three, Samuel, 18 months and two-month-old Liberty-Grace all have different reasons why they enjoy learning at home, they all agree that they love not having to go to school.

'The others look up to me and I have responsibilities, but I've learnt how to do lots of things because of it,' says Elizabeth, who is working towards home-schooling certificates, which are recognised by universities. 'Although it's busy, there's still time to do things I enjoy, like reading and horse riding.'

Abigail says, 'I like being able to work outside in the summer if I want.'



## Home time

Mum with (left to right) Susanna, seven, Barnabas, five, Josiah, three, Samuel, 18 months, Elizabeth, 14, Jesse, eight, Peninnah, nine and Abigail, 12

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While Peninnah adds, 'If we get stuck with our work, we can get help until we understand it.'

When the kids aren't learning, they help on the farm, play in the garden or do chores. The family follow a rota that means everyone gets involved in the cooking and cleaning. 'In most cases, I find it's bored children who get into mischief, so my secret is to keep them busy,' says Margaret-Rose.

## Best opportunities

Margaret-Rose's decision to home-school her family was brought about



by her own experiences. Along with four of her children, she has hearing problems that limit hearing in one ear.

‘My hearing difficulties made it tricky for me in mainstream schooling,’ says Margaret-Rose. ‘I struggled to hear the teacher and felt cut off from my classmates. It was a problem that I was keen to avoid with my children.’

Because the family is so large, they don’t miss out on the social interaction with other children they would get at school. ‘I was an only child and I hated it,’ says Margaret-Rose. ‘We never set a number so our family has just grown

over the years. Fred and I work as a team and now that some of the children are older, they work with us to make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible.’

And while Margaret-Rose is dedicated to her hectic role as mother and teacher, she says it hasn’t been easy. ‘I’ll be the first to admit it has been a learning experience,’ she says. ‘As I’ve had more children over the years I’ve adapted and learnt what works and what doesn’t. It’s definitely been worth it for the whole family. And for us, the family always comes first.’ ■

## Home-schooling

### THE LOW-DOWN

While education for your children is compulsory, school is not, and home-schooling is becoming more popular. But it’s not a decision to be taken lightly, many parents are unhappy with the education on offer in schools, worry about bullying, or feel their child has needs that aren’t being addressed – particularly if they have learning difficulties. Up to 50,000 families in the UK are now home-schooling as an alternative.

The Education Act states that parents must ensure that their children are educated ‘at school or otherwise’ according to age, ability, and aptitude. The definition of ‘education’ is broad and encompasses both home

tuition as well as autonomous or interest-based learning styles. If you think home-schooling may be suitable, do your research to make sure it’s right for you and your child. You may need to hire a home tutor and your child will still need to interact with other kids regularly to stop them feeling lonely.

✳ The Department for Education and Skills sets out conditions parents have to fulfil in order to educate their child at home; these can be seen on their website [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk).

✳ Contact the Home Education Advisory Service on 01707 371854 or [www.heas.org.uk](http://www.heas.org.uk), or try [www.home-ed.co.uk](http://www.home-ed.co.uk).