

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE LIVING WITH A GIFTED CHILD?

Having a child who is identified as being gifted and talented may be a pleasure for some parents. For other parents, there is more to their child than the academic successes they achieve in the school environment.

Following is one parent's experience on what it is like...

Living with Beccah

She started to read at 16 months. We didn't realise she could but sitting at my mum's one holiday she was reading the front of the newspaper. My mum said, 'She is reading that' and she was. She could read all her favourite books but we assumed that was as she knew them off by heart not because she could really read. Rebeccah has this warped sense of humour that even then shone through. But she was also on the go all the time, a bit like a tiger. Trampolines have been great for all her energy. She has only ever slept for 5 hours at night.

Often people say to me: 'Oh it must make life easy to have a child who is bright' or they will say: 'It doesn't matter where she goes to school or who her teacher is because she is so good at school'.

This really isn't the case. I wonder if these people have ever had a Home School Liaison Officer appear at their home? I have. When Rebeccah was only in year one. Beccah had 47 days off school, much to our horror. She would scream and have tantrums and make herself sick until she was allowed to stay home. Our friend, who was the Home School Liaison Officer, turned up on our door step. He told me he wasn't on a social visit but here to talk about Rebeccah and her school attendance. We were mortified that our child had caused the truancy person to come to see us. You don't expect that!.

47 days is almost a whole school term. Rebeccah just refused to go. She would wake up and work up to this huge tantrum. With 3 other children, one of whom is autistic, a husband that worked away several nights a week and a major trauma of our house burning down, she would win and get to stay home. I also wasn't convinced that they were meeting her needs as she was in a K/1 class. Every time she finished a task the teacher would give her busy work of another sheet which I have kept in a box. 72 of them are the same sheet! How was that helping her learn or engaging her?

At the end of this horror school year, when she won the school academic achievement award, I asked the teacher about it. I was told, "Well she was the top student in all the 6 year one classes but her handwriting is really terrible."

Her first year at school was nothing like this. Have you seen the movie Maltilda? Well Beccah had a teacher just like Miss Honey, one who all children should be so lucky to have.

One who took an interest, even rang me and told me that Beccah had started school reading at a level 32 pm reader, so I knew where she was up to. She was so sensitive to all kids needs that she didn't allow Rebeccah to be put in the reading group in

year 2 as her older sister was in that class. She tried so hard to engage Rebeccah and all the other children in her class. How lucky they all were to have her as their kindy teacher. Thank you Miss Burrows from Collarenebri Central!

Before Rebeccah entered year 2 we took her to GERRIC, where she was given an IQ test to help us to help the school cater for her needs. She returned to school that year with another great teacher and he really had her engaged and working with other kids at their level. Rebeccah went on to have only 2 days off, genuinely ill, that year. And, at the end of the year, another award that was more gracefully bestowed.

Rebeccah is by no means an easy child. She was 10 before she could tie her shoe laces. Her rational, when she was 4 and we were trying to teach her: 'How many pairs of shoes with laces do you own, mum?' How do you argue with that type of logic?

We did have a rocky start in year 7 as her friends were not going to the same school as her. But we promised that if she didn't like it after the first year, she could look at changing schools. She did stress a great deal over the fact that the other kids seemed to know more than her and how come she hadn't learnt this or that at primary school.

She did brilliantly at her end of year report and she seemed settled. She doesn't always have the best social skills and finds it really hard to make new friends. She only likes to eat white food and no food on the plate is allowed to touch. But she is now in year 8 in an extension class within a comprehensive high school that again is catering for her needs. She seems happy there now.

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