

Home Education Report: Isaac Blackhurst

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Date: 05/11/2023

1. Introduction:

Home education is a lifestyle choice for our family.

Having creative parents who both work at home on various projects, Isaac has enjoyed spending his pre-school years alongside Mummy and Daddy. On a daily basis he sees us creating artwork, writing stories, designing products, and for Isaac this creativity is simply a natural part of everyday life. He loves to join in with our creative processes – asking how things work, making creative suggestions – and is inspired to work on his own projects too. Isaac has thrived in this creative home environment. He is happy, bright, confident, curious and eager to learn, and, as a family who enjoys being together, we can see no real benefit in imposing a formal school environment upon Isaac.

Isaac has been fully involved in the decision to home educate. Home education is his preference. He also knows that, should he want to, he can go to school (and we will review this with Isaac before each new academic year).

Isaac only just turned six years old in October this year (2023). We as parents believe that age four to five is too young to begin formal learning, and that learning at such a young age should be through play and child-led activities. Isaac developed many new skills this way during what would have been the Reception year (had he attended school).

Now that Isaac is in 'Year 1' we have introduced an element of formal learning, which began in September this year in line with the start of the academic year. In the mornings, Isaac's learning is structured, focusing on literacy and numeracy. In the afternoons, his learning is more spontaneous, child-led, focusing on activities or projects chosen by Isaac.

We have chosen not to rigidly follow the National Curriculum (or any other curriculum) but to use it only as a loose reference for educational expectations and standards. Isaac's education will be equivalent to that of his peers, albeit delivered in a less rigid and less hurried way – and tailored to Isaac as an individual.

Isaac's education will be delivered by both parents.

2. Structured Learning:

Parent-led learning takes place every morning, Monday to Friday, from 9:30am to 1:00pm approximately. This is intensive learning time where Isaac has either Mummy's or Daddy's full attention as he practises his literacy and numeracy skills by engaging in a variety of exercises and

activities. Isaac has a 15-minute break half way through the morning for a healthy snack and also for a little bit of physical activity (which quite often involves Isaac running and leaping around as he pretends to be an adventurous knight!)

Every morning starts with a journal-like worksheet in which Isaac practices writing the date, day and month (in both word and number formats), records the day's weather, notes any special occasions, and completes a short quiz which requires using a calendar. We use this worksheet as an opportunity to discuss occasions and events throughout the year, such as the start of a new season, Harvest and Thanksgiving.

Isaac then focuses on a couple of the following literacy or numeracy activities:

- Phonics using colour-coded letter tiles.
- Reading and spelling using flashcards and letter tiles.
- High frequency words using word-specific worksheets (including word puzzles).
- Reading and comprehension of level-appropriate short texts, stories and poems.
- Handwriting and correct letter formation practice (using 'Sassoon Infant' as standard).
- Grammar and punctuation exercises from Usborne workbooks.
- Addition and subtraction using maths flashcards.
- Measuring and weighing practise with everyday objects.
- Addition, subtraction, division and multiplication exercises from Usborne workbooks.

We approach these activities with flexibility, working at an appropriate pace for Isaac to develop a proper understanding of words and numbers (as well as self-confidence in his ability to do so).

Towards the end of the day Isaac returns to his daily worksheet to complete 'Today's Best Bits' – a section for written notes – which encourages positive reflection upon the day's activities. Isaac is always enthusiastic about this, and it nicely bookends his learning day.

3. Unstructured Learning:

From 2:00pm Monday to Friday Isaac engages in child-led activities.

We encourage Isaac to work on projects of his own choosing, to explore his own ideas, and to experiment with available materials and resources. We try not to step in with our own suggestions unless Isaac specifically asks for our help. It's our opinion that freedom to experiment in this way, and to pursue one's own ideas even if they don't quite work out, is vital to the development of individual creativity.

Some of Isaac's afternoon activities include:

Making books. Isaac enjoys creating books, both fiction and non-fiction. He achieves this simply by folding sheets of A4 paper and sticking them within a front and back cover. His picture books include a series called 'The Adventures of Mr and Mrs Rainbow,' in which Isaac created collage-style illustrations. One of our favourite examples is 'Mr Leopard and the Lost Diamond,' which Isaac was inspired to create after reading *Mr Penguin and the Lost Treasure*. Isaac's experiments with making

picture books have taught him about sequential illustration, and he has enjoyed using a light-box to learn how to create consistency within those illustrations. Isaac has also learnt about story structure; that all stories need a beginning, middle and an end.

Drawing and painting. Isaac's drawing ability is improving all the time as he gains greater pencil control. Recently, he has been experimenting with three-dimension and perspective in his pictures, inspired by observing the works of famous artists in various books. Isaac has a good understanding of colour; he knows how to mix secondary colours from the three primary colours and enjoys experimenting by adding small amounts of black and white to make lighter and darker shades. He has also been learning how to use watercolour paints. By experimentation and practice he has come to understand that watercolours require a much lighter touch than opaque paints.

Lego construction. Isaac loves Lego. He is extremely good at following instructions, sometimes over 150 pages long, to create all kinds of detailed Lego models. This is especially impressive because he does this with no help from us at all. In addition, Isaac enjoys experimenting and constructing his own Lego creations. He recently made a wonderfully inventive Lego dinosaur museum, featuring a Lego T-Rex exhibition and a Lego Diplodocus (with neck and head poking out of the museum roof). Sometimes Isaac creates a step-by-step instruction booklet to accompany his own Lego creation. Lego has been great for improving Isaac's ability to concentrate and focus. It also reinforces the mathematical skills he has learnt in his morning lessons: for example, understanding quantity, order, pattern and symmetry.

Reading non-fiction: Isaac regularly spends time looking through non-fiction books, especially Usborne's series of *Questions & Answers* books. His ever-growing collection includes: dinosaurs, animals, space, nature, art, science, our world... Isaac often initiates family discussions about these topics, which usually leads to further research – or even experiments. For example, Isaac recently used his birthday balloons to experiment with static electricity.

Paper craft. Isaac enjoys making things out of paper. He calls this 'paper play' because he can play with his paper creations after he's finished making them. He has made a castle with turret and battlements and stand-up figures. He's also made several very cute paper houses, complete with tiny paper furniture inside – even a fridge containing an even tinier punnet of blueberries. To construct three-dimensional objects from paper, Isaac has to problem-solve, often by thinking creatively about shape and form.

Music improvisation. Isaac likes to listen to examples of different types of music – pop, rock, classical, folk, etc – and is inspired to have a go at creating his own music. He has a ukulele and a homemade drum (which he made himself) and experiments with sound and rhythm. He especially loves singing his own songs, improvising lyrics, and exploring the range of his voice.

Game designing. Isaac spent several days fully focused on making his own board game (inspired by the board games we play as a family). He made a game board, cards, tokens, characters, all just using paper, scissors and pencil crayons, as well as creating his own rules of play. Isaac also made his own deck of unique playing cards for which he drew and coloured 52 original pictures. We then spent many evenings playing with Isaac's deck of cards. Seeing the results of his hard work being enjoyed by all the family gave Isaac a great sense of achievement.

We've been impressed by the enthusiasm, self-motivation and commitment Isaac has demonstrated during these afternoon child-led activities. His focus on self-initiated projects is excellent; he often spends hours, and sometimes days, working on a project. His projects don't always turn out as he anticipated, but that in itself is a valuable learning experience. Through child-led activities Isaac's skills are improving all the time: his dexterity, focus, observation, patience, knowledge, as well as his ability to problem solve and work through obstacles.

4. Literacy:

Isaac has always had access to a wide variety of books, and we have always read to him on a daily basis. As book-loving parents we wanted to pass that love onto Isaac from a very young age – and we have. It's lovely to see that Isaac derives lots of enjoyment from books. So much so that he is eager to learn to read and write, not only to read his favourite books all by himself, but also to create his own books and write his own stories.

Although Isaac still enjoys looking at his picture books, he has reached a stage where he's eager for longer stories – for chapter books. Isaac listens intently as stories are read to him. He follows the plot of full-length books (200+ pages), appreciates humour, suspense and mystery, and engages with characters within the stories. He shows good comprehension skills and talks enthusiastically about stories we've read to him.

Isaac's favourite books are the *Mr Penguin* series by Alex T. Smith and we have read all four books to him many times (so many times we've lost count). Isaac finds these stories fun and exciting, and, being a series, he's grown to love the characters. He's hoping Alex T. Smith will write book five very soon!

Isaac is currently enjoying a new series of four chapter books, *Sherlock Bones*, which cleverly weave observation and number puzzles into the story narrative. After that, Isaac has planned his reading schedule for December: Alex T. Smith's wonderful Christmas books, including *How Winston Delivered Christmas*, *The Grumpus* and *The Nutcracker*.

Isaac is not able to read chapter books by himself yet, but, as we read to him, he insists we run our finger under the words. This has given Isaac a familiarity with words, especially high frequency words, even before we introduced formal learning. Early exposure to books has also given Isaac an impressive vocabulary. We are often surprised by his use of words – such as the word 'literally' – which are used in the correct context too.

Isaac began learning phonics in September this year. The overall structure of learning is based upon *Read Write Inc. Phonics* (which is the method used by the local school) albeit delivered in an order and at a pace best suited to Isaac.

Isaac is learning to phonetically decode words by way of flashcards and colour-coded letter tiles that represent all 40+ phonemes in the English language. This method effectively teaches reading and spelling at the same time: the text side of the flashcard for reading, and the picture side of the flashcard for spelling. These learning materials are created by us and designed to be fun for Isaac to

use. (Isaac likes to be involved in the creative process too by watching and helping Mummy design the flashcards in Adobe Photoshop.)

Isaac has quickly taken to this method of learning phonics. So far, he has focused on: short vowel sounds, consonant sounds, consonant blends and consonant digraphs. Although Isaac started leaning phonics only two months ago, he is already confident in decoding many words. We are extremely happy with Isaac's progress. More importantly, so too is Isaac. His sense of accomplishment is evident, and lovely for us to witness, when he happily exclaims, "Look at all these words I can read!" and "I can spell! I'm spelling!"

In addition to his homemade phonics kit, Isaac also practices phonic skills in context. For this we prepare short paragraphs or simple stories using decodable words, and we ensure these are fun to read aloud by making the text relevant to Isaac's everyday life and interests.

Isaac is now eager to progress to the next stage of phonics: vowel digraphs and split digraphs. He will begin with predictable long vowels – such as 'ee' and 'ay' – before moving onto the more tricky ones.

Isaac has also been learning basic grammar: when to use capital letters and full-stops, exclamation and question marks; how to use conjunctions 'and' and 'but'; how to make words plural by adding 's' or 'es'. He is also learning about sentence structure and is confident in placing word cards in the correct order to form basic sentences.

5. Numeracy.

Isaac has a good understanding of number placement, addition and subtraction. He developed these skills, during the 'Reception' year, by playing board games. Isaac loves playing a game called 'Legends of Andor', a fantasy adventure aimed at ages twelve and above, which requires both strategy and co-operation. Isaac quickly grasped the rules of play, despite them being somewhat complex. The game introduced Isaac to basic maths concepts, in a playful way that he enjoys such as adding and subtracting dice rolls, and prepared him for learning more challenging maths.

Isaac is now developing his numeracy skills by (loosely) following the *White Rose Maths* curriculum, which will ensure he is exploring all areas of maths expected of his age group in general. This method explores separate maths topics per school term and emphasises deep understanding over memorization and speed. Isaac is currently focusing on place value within 0 – 50, addition and subtraction, shape, length and height.

Isaac enjoys practising addition and subtraction by using homemade maths flashcards. These colourful cards present numbers in a variety of ways: digits, words, tallies, dice, fingers, 10-frames, dots, etc. The cards can be used to place and sort numbers or to randomly generate equations of various difficulty levels.

Isaac engages well in practical maths activities:

- Weighing ingredients for recipes (most recently Pumpkin Pie for Halloween!)
- Drawing lines using a 30cm ruler to specified lengths.

- Drawing 2D shapes using an architect's stencil to specified sizes.
- Filling measuring jugs with specified amounts of water.
- Counting out coins – 1p, 2p, 5p, 10p, 50p, £1 – to specified prices.

Isaac is quick in adding together one- and two-digit numbers. He is developing an understanding of metric measurements, metres, grams, and money, and he can easily recognise shapes and pattern sequences. He is also able to identify on a clock the hour, quarter past, half past and quarter to with confidence.

6. Field Trips and Days Out.

We believe field trips, hands-on experiences, are hugely important. Isaac has a keen interest in knights and medieval times, born from his love of fantasy stories and games, and so in the summer we visited Ludlow Castle. Of course, Isaac loved it! He explored every single part of the castle, climbing spiral staircases, walking the battlements, looking out from the turrets... He even got to see a real suit of armour. We purchased a lovely children's activity pack from the castle shop, which included puzzles, word searches, mazes, crosswords, stickers, memory games, etc, for Isaac to enjoy some related educational activities the following day.

We also took a field trip to Stokesay Castle where Isaac could observe the differences between a Castle and a Fortified Manor. Isaac especially enjoyed the audio tour in which the history of Stokesay is narrated by actors, as if in medieval times, accompanied by sound effects to evoke a sense of atmosphere. Isaac was completely absorbed.

Both castle visits inspired Isaac to work on several related projects. For example, he enjoyed making papier-mâché armour, a helmet, sword and shield (which have given him hours of fun ever since). He also made a picture book called 'Knight Times' and experimented with how to make the book's paper appear old.

Living within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, Isaac has access to an abundance of local museums – all within walking distance. The 'Ironbridge Valley of Invention' annual family pass, which we subscribe to, includes entry to the following museums: Blists Hill Victorian Town, Enginuity, Museum of the Gorge, Coalport China Museum, Jackfield Tile Museum, Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron and Darby Houses.

Isaac's favourites are Blists Hill and Enginuity.

Enginuity is a science museum filled with all kinds of hands-on experiments for children to explore and have fun with. A water-powered dam experiment is a particular favourite of Isaac's, as well as an interactive blast furnace experience (which involves lots of jumping about, pretending to crush iron ore). There are interesting experiments for Isaac to try involving various ways of creating energy to power everyday objects such as lights, radios and vacuum cleaners. It was here at Enginuity that Isaac made a discovery about Lego: it comes in all different shapes and sizes, including the teeniest of pieces, making highly detailed model-building possible. There's been no stopping Isaac ever since!

7. Social & Physical Opportunities:

Annual membership to the Ironbridge museums includes free entry to a variety of workshops and activities especially for children. Most of these workshops take place during school half-terms. This gives Isaac the opportunity to experience an instructor-led activity alongside other children of a similar age group on a regular basis. Isaac interacts well with others during these activities. His favourite workshops are the clay modelling sessions held at Coalport China Museum. He also enjoys craft workshops at Enginuity, such as making movable paper puppets.

Isaac is fortunate to be growing up in a small town where there is a sense of community spirit amongst the residents. As such he has opportunity to interact with others on an almost daily basis. All of our neighbours, of various age groups, know Isaac by name. It's lovely to see that he is recognised as a little person in his own right (not just an extension of his parents). For example, Isaac is always greeted with "Hello, Isaac!" at the local Post Office, and, whilst he hands over parcels to be weighed, he and the assistant chat about how the day's going so far. We have always encouraged Isaac to speak for himself and we're happy to see that he is confident in participating in conversation – even with grownups. Isaac clearly feels that he is part of the community; his naturally sunny disposition makes him popular within that community, as well as making it easy for Isaac to make friends of all ages.

Isaac loves living in an area surrounded by woodland and forest walks. His favourite form of exercise is walking and hiking, often long and challenging routes, where he is surrounded by the natural world. Isaac's stamina for walking is particularly impressive. He can easily walk 2 miles – from Ironbridge to Coalport, for example – and 2 miles back again.

We take long woodland walks as often as possible, but, if time is limited, we visit one of two nearby parks instead – both ideal places for Isaac to run around. Isaac enjoys a game whereby he is given a set of instructions to remember and follow. For example: "Run towards the large tree, go around it once, then run to the small tree..." In addition to local parks, 'The Madeley Wood Co. Outdoor Adventure' at Blists Hill also offers ample opportunity for physical activity. Here Isaac can climb multi-level climbing structures, zoom across a zip-wire and slide down shoots, all within a beautiful woodland setting. Isaac really enjoys this; it's great fun for him, a social activity and good exercise too.

8. Other Subjects and General Learning:

We don't have a specific schedule or programme of learning for subjects such as history, science, geography, etc. These subjects come up in everyday life – in conversation, in things we see, in books we read – and we explore them with Isaac as and when.

An example: Whilst reading *Mr Penguin and the Tomb of Doom*, which is set in Egypt, Isaac asked lots of questions about Ancient Egypt. He was particularly interested in Egyptian art. Some of his questions could be answered in books, but he was eager to see more examples, so he researched the topic online (under supervision). This led to a family discussion about different types of Egyptian art and the purposes of those art forms within Ancient Egyptian culture. Subsequently, Isaac spent

the rest of the afternoon building a model pyramid. First he experimented with construction ideas using Lego and then he made a paper pyramid within a desert scene.

Another example was a discussion, sparked by Isaac's lunch, about seeds in tomatoes. Isaac wondered if a tomato is a fruit because it has seeds, and how exactly do tomatoes grow from such tiny seeds. This led to Isaac planting the seeds from his lunchtime tomato. Over the following months he diligently tended to his tomato plants, excited to see seeds turn to shoots and shoots turn to vines. In fact he enjoyed it so much that he decided to make little videos in which he talked all about the progress of his tomatoes. Isaac's commitment was rewarded by lots of yummy tomatoes, which in his humble opinion were the best tasting tomatoes ever.

Isaac then went on to grow an apple tree from seed (which is now about half a metre tall). Growing food from seed has been a great experience for Isaac. Not only because it demonstrates to him how fruit is grown, and the life cycle of plants, but also because it encourages nurturing, patience and commitment. It's also led to many conversations about types of foods and the types of nutrients within those foods.

As parents we believe that nature is an important part of a child's wellbeing and development. We live in a semi-rural location overlooking the River Severn which provides Isaac with limitless opportunities to study the natural environment. Isaac is always super excited to discover wildlife living in and around his garden. So far, he has been able to observe many different types of birds, squirrels, pheasants, frogs, mice, shrews, bugs and slowworms. (He hasn't spotted a hedgehog yet, but he really, really wants to!)

In the springtime Isaac learned how birds make nests. He has of course seen this in books, but seeing it first hand is even better. Having watched birds tirelessly build their nests day after day, Isaac appreciates the huge effort involved in that process. As a result he understands why it is important to respect and protect birds' nests. Throughout the summer months Isaac enjoyed trying to identifying the many types of birds that visit the garden: sparrows, wrens, tits, robins, and some very friendly blackbirds. Now that autumn is here Isaac is watching and learning how animals prepare for winter. From the kitchen window, he quietly observes the daily habits of a squirrel, scurrying back and forth, back and forth, as it carefully buries nuts and acorns ready for the winter.

It's clear to us that Isaac feels empathy towards animals – which is so important and lovely for us to see – and that he has an appreciation of and respect for the natural world.

Overall, Isaac has a good knowledge of a wide variety of topics: the Big Bang, the planets, dinosaurs, food, music, recycling, conservation, mythological creatures, medieval times... The list is endless. At this stage in Isaac's education, these subjects are kept informal. Discussions may just be discussions, or, if Isaac chooses, developed into child-led projects.

What's most important is that Isaac is engaged with the world around him, eager to learn and to understand, and views the world as a place filled with amazing, fascinating and curious things.

9. Conclusion.

We are extremely happy with Isaac's development and progress and feel confident that he is receiving a fulltime education suitable to his age, needs and aptitudes. The combination of parent-led learning in the mornings and child-led learning in the afternoons is working extremely well for all of us as a family. Parent-led learning ensures that Isaac is consistently developing his literacy and numeracy skills, in a structured way, and that his progress is similar to his peers following the National Curriculum at school. Child-led learning gives Isaac the opportunity to explore his own interests, to learn by experience, to expand his creativity, and to develop many important life skills: self-motivation, critical thinking, problem solving, independence and self-confidence.

This is only Year 1 of Isaac's home education and we as parents are constantly learning too. No doubt we will adapt and modify the current daily learning routine along the way, making new discoveries about what works and what doesn't as Isaac's needs and interests evolve over time. However, our primary focus will always remain the same: to nurture Isaac's innate curiosity and enthusiasm so that he develops a life-long love of learning, and to give him creative freedom and self-confidence to discover and pursue his own interests in life.



A selection of Isaac's creative book projects.



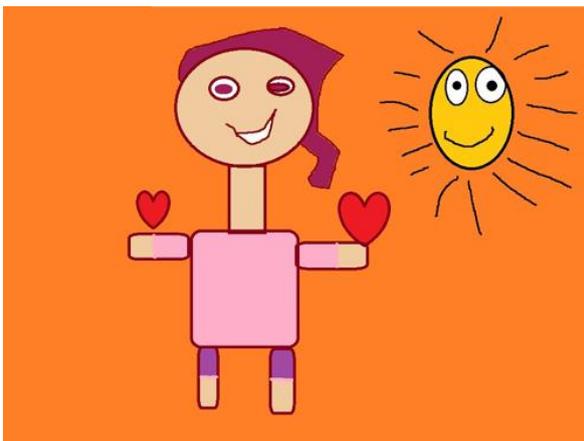
Papier-mâché blob monsters.



Lego construction with detailed instructions.



More Lego construction!



Digital art using shapes (a picture of Mummy).



Screenshot from Isaac's video about growing his tomato plants.

11. Resources

Usborne Workbook Series (age 5 – 6):

- English & Maths Giant Workbook.
- Spelling Workbook.
- Grammar & Punctuation Workbook.
- Comprehension Workbook.
- Adding Workbook.
- Subtracting Workbook.
- Times Tables Workbook.

Usborne Workbook Series (age 6 – 7):

- English & Maths Giant Workbook.

Usborne Question & Answers Series (age 5+):

- Our World.
- Nature.
- Animals.
- Dinosaurs.
- Long Ago.
- Art.
- Space.
- Science.

Twinkl Membership:

- Access to over 900,000 educational resources, age appropriate worksheets, curriculum outlines for parents.

White Rose Maths Workbooks (Year 1):

- Autumn Block
- Spring Block
- Summer Block

Art Materials:

- Paper, pencils, coloured pencils, water colours, gouache paints.

Craft Materials:

- Coloured paper, tissue paper, felt, string, glue, scissors, stencils, poster paints.