

Re: Gifted math student

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- *From:* "Karl M. Bunday" <kmbunday@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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Dave (from the UK) wrote, in reply to Tim's reply to the OP:

Have you considered homeschooling him?

If you are thinking of withdrawing him from school completely and having all lessons at home, my thoughts are that creates more problems than it solves.

It's actually a very rare case that a homeschooled student has "all lessons at home." The majority of the homeschoolers I know (mostly here in the United States, although I have met a few British homeschooling parents when they have traveled here) have their children visit real-world places of interest such as museums, farms, factories, and the like, and arrange joint classes with other families for their children. My son, specifically, at age thirteen attends one joint class in computer programming at a proprietary business college with other homeschooled students, attends two other joint classes (one in chemistry and one in biology) with several of the same students at privately arranged lab spaces, attends another group of joint classes (writing and painting) with children from yet other families, and spends much time hanging out with the neighbors and playing video games in the manner of most American children. He walks frequently to the public library to look for books and plays defense on a "traveling league" soccer team. His social network today is actually far wider than mine was at the same age, when I was a full-time junior high pupil.

There was a case in England about 10 years ago when a young girl, who I think was 8 at the time, wanted to do maths at Cambridge.

If you are indeed thinking of the case of Ruth Lawrence, as suggested by another reply you have received, that was more than twenty years ago. Her case is quite interesting in that she received a phenomenal mathematics education as a result of her early college entrance, and is now a professor of mathematics. She looks back on some aspects of her education, according to news reports, as undesirable on social grounds, but it is a little bit unclear whether her greatest objection is to

- a) initial homeschooling
- b) early university entrance at a highly selective university

or

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c) her father's rather controlling pattern of dealing with her education. She has, of course, a perfect right to do otherwise than her parents did, and to advocate doing otherwise, but similarly any other parent who remembers school experiences in his or her generation has a right to attempt to do better than was done in his or her own education.

But they turned her down, despite the academic qualifications were as good as they would expect of anyone entering as ungrad. I think another uni took her. I can't find a reference to this on the web, so perhaps someone else recalls the details better.

The Wikipedia article posted to you in the other reply covers many of the biographical details, and a simple Google search on the name of that professor will turn up other details. I have never met Professor Lawrence and will allow her to speak for herself about her experiences, if indeed it is her experiences you are recalling.

I can't help feeling sorry for someone like that.

I can't help but feeling sorry for some of my childhood classmates, who were plainly very smart, but who never had a supportive social environment in their public (American language—you would say "state") schools. The oddity about amassing anecdotes about what the right thing to do is is that gifted students who quietly languish in obscurity because of unsuitable school programs make less news than the conspicuous gifted students who do something unusual for their educations. It's not clear to me that the weight of evidence favors doing only and exactly what most schools do for most gifted students. I try to gather what information I can about many examples of gifted students following many different educational paths, and adjust our family's plans accordingly.

Whilst I realise the original poster was not intending this course of action, children need to grow up and experience life for themselves and perhaps too much encouragement (pushing?) is a bad thing.

The devil is in the detail of recognizing what is "pushing" and what is responding to a child's desire for deeper knowledge of a subject. I heartily agree that children need to be self-motivated (at all ability levels) and have freedom to pursue a personally satisfying path. If a school environment obstructs that path, I would not be afraid of removing the child from that environment.

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