

Education alternatives for children without a school placement in 2020

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In the coming weeks, thousands of parents in Gauteng will be hoping that their applications to place their children in schools of their choice will be successful.



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At the end of last month, the Gauteng Department of Education said it received a record number of 300,000 online applications for Grade 1-8 placements next year.

The department is now currently putting together waiting lists and is expected to send communication to parents on the next steps.

What's topical about 2020 applications is that they are happening against a backdrop of a changing schools admissions landscape in the province.

Until recently, many Gauteng public schools prioritised applicants living or working within a 5km radius of their schools. This diminished the chances of children living further away from better-resourced schools from being admitted to these schools.

But for the last 18 months, the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) has been acting on a 2016 Constitutional Court ruling to address this. And in November 2018 new regulations regarding the province's feeder zones were officially gazetted.

While this move gives more children access to better quality public schools, the reality is that it will also place a greater demand on better-resourced schools, meaning that there is a possibility that a parent may not get their child into the school of their choice.

For these parents, another choice may be to send their children to a private school. But with the current challenging economic environment in South Africa, this too may be a bridge too far for many.

However, there is an affordable, viable alternative that is growing rapidly in popularity: that of home education.



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Home education as an option

Ever since being legalised in South Africa in 1996, home education has been on a steady growth path, becoming more mainstream.

According to the 2011 census, there were 56,857 home education learners in the country. Recent unverified estimates have put this number at 100,000 learners.

As one of the country's biggest home education providers, Impaq had just 400 learners in 2002 — but this number grew to 16,000 learners in 2018 and is expected to surpass 18,000 in 2019.

A big reason why more children are doing home education than ever before is that it is incredibly flexible, especially when considering that providers such as Impaq follow the same CAPS-aligned curriculum that every school in the country follows.

Learners who use Impaq's solutions also fall under examination bodies overseen by Umalusi, such as the South African Comprehensive Assessment Institute (SACAI) or the IEB.

This means that a child between Grade 1-12 can enter home education and even return to mainstream schooling at any point, without missing a step in their educational journey.

In addition, home education can give learners more choice. For example, learners at FET level (Grade 10-12) can do subjects such as Visual Arts or Drama. Home education learners can also take their subjects in Afrikaans while Zulu, as a first additional language, will be on offer for Grade 1-3 learners from next year. Impaq learners can also take Robotics and Coding as a supplementary subject from 2020.

Home education parents also get very detailed facilitator guides, which tell them how to teach a subject.

Parents can still further seek out the assistance of a tutor in specific curriculum areas, if they feel a need for this. There are hundreds of tutors across South Africa and they are independent of curriculum providers.

Finally, doing home education doesn't mean that your child misses out on social and integration activities either. In fact, home educated children can have more time to engage in several extra-curricular activities and interact with a variety of

peers.

There are home education communities, for instance, that organise sports and even other activities such as debating. There are even matric farewells for these learners too.

All in all, home education is increasingly becoming a viable alternative in South Africa. And if you as a parent struggle to place your child in a school of your choice, it's good to know that there are viable alternatives that you can use.

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