

Notes from a Home Schoolroom Parent

by R. Hudson

(from Thailand)

AS an overseas PNEU parent who recently taught his son for two years, I decided to write a few notes on how I applied the PNEU School courses of work in the home schoolroom. These notes try to show how one parent and child team went about the matter, and how the excellent suggestions sent out by the PNEU staff were adapted to suit the conditions existing at this particular home in the small town of Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand. They deal rather briefly with what I may call the mechanics of ensuring that the term's syllabus is completed smoothly in the time available. They are not concerned with the probably more vital matters of methods of instruction, teaching techniques, and the actual preparation and teaching of each lesson. Perhaps they may be of interest to other parents in similar conditions.

Programme. E. was 7½ years when he started in Form Lower IA, before progressing to Upper IA and then on to IIB. As soon as a term's programme was received, I underlined in red all the essential books printed in CAPITAL LETTERS, and then underlined in blue some of the optional books which appealed and which I thought necessary to supplement the term's work. A white card was made out for each book, showing full details of title, author, publisher and price. Spaces were left for 'Ordered from', 'Date ordered' and 'Date received'. Orders were compiled from these cards, and sent to either the Academy Bookshop or to the PNEU. When the books arrived, the date was entered on the cards. Eventually there were four lots of cards bundled separately with rubber bands, with labels on the top of each stating 'Books ordered but not yet received', 'Books in use', 'Books received for next term' and 'Books no longer needed'. The number of books involved was quite large after two years, and the cards proved extremely useful for checking which had been ordered and which had arrived, and also for checking the books actually in use during any periodical tidy-up of the book shelves. The 'Books no longer needed' were either left for E.'s younger sister, or placed in the home library, or otherwise disposed of.

Syllabus. The next step was to start to prepare a 'Syllabus and Profile Chart'. To enable this to be done, a list was made out by subjects, showing what syllabus was to be covered in each book. The number of pages to be studied was noted, and divided by the number of weeks in the term (12 minus 1 for exams = 11) to find out the approximate number of pages to be studied each week. Everything was included—poems, songs, picture study, art, etc. Then the Profile Chart was drawn up. During the term, the actual progress made during each lesson was shown visually by shading the Profile Chart at the end of each lesson.

[p 136]

At the end of Week 3 it might have looked something like this:

FORM II B—1st TERM								
SUBJECT	Reference	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	etc. to Week 10

ENGLISH	Daily Writing	D	A	I	L	Y	D	A
	Dictation	p 1	p 2	p 3	p 4	p 5	p 6	etc
	Creative Writing	E 1	E 2	E 3	E 4	E 5	E 6	etc
	Better English, Book 4	5–7	8–10	11–14	15–17	18–21	22–23	etc
	Sheldon Book of Verse	1st Poem ↔			2nd Poem ↔			etc.
	Puck of Pook's Hill	1–8	9–16	17–24	25–32	33–40	41–48	etc
HISTORY	The Medieval Scene	47–49	50–52	52–55	56–58	59–61	62–64	etc
GEOGRAPHY	Looking at Britain	63–65	66–68	69–71	71–74	75–77	78–80	etc
SCIENCE	Book 4, Experimenting	37–38	39–40	41–43	44–46	47–48	49–51	etc
	Your Book of Astronomy	50–51	52–53	54–55	56–57	58–59	60–61	etc
MATHS	Beta Maths, Books 2 & 3	Book 2 76–78	79–81	82–84	Book 3 1–3	4–6	7–9	etc
FRENCH	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc
LATIN	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc
etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc	etc

Notes. P1 and E1 refer to Practice 1 and Exercise 1 etc. Other figures refer to pages in the textbooks (in this case taken rather at random for purposes of illustration only).

By glancing at the above table, I could see how work was progressing at any time during the week. At the end of Week 3, it would have been apparent that work was up to schedule in all subjects except Science and Maths, but that it was ahead of schedule in History and in one English subject. Whatever daily timetable I adopted, I inevitably found too little time devoted to one subject, and too much to another. The aim was to finish the week with a 'straight' profile—certainly the last week—and it was generally on about the Thursday of each week that I could see if we were a bit behind schedule in any subject. The daily timetable was then adjusted slightly by referring to the profile again, and seeing in which subjects we were ahead of schedule, and suitable rearrangements made for Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Daily Timetable. This was prepared after I had seen the amount of work required, as shown up by the Profile Sheet. The timetable sent by the PNEU School was consulted, as were the 'Suggestions on the use of the programme'. Looking back now, I see the number of hours of study recommended per day was 5 hours 20 minutes, so over a 5-day week this would come to 26 hours 40 minutes. In our case, we had to fit in music lessons and practice during school hours, also time for travel to these periods. On Wednesday afternoons E. had to go off to Wolf [p 137]

Cubs at 2.20 p.m. We lost some time on these activities which we made up by working for 3 hours on Saturday mornings, and also by having a lesson after tea on Fridays—the only time E.'s French teacher was available. The total worked out at 27 hours 40 minutes, only one hour more than the PNEU timetable, close enough to be acceptable, I trust.

Daily Routine. We followed the daily timetable, referring to the Profile chart for the actual work to be done during the week. If the chart indicated we had to read, say, 7 pages of history, but we found a chapter had 10 pages, we would prefer to finish off the chapter during the week. The following week we would find less to do, and possibly finish the lesson before the allotted time. A glance at the Profile Chart would perhaps show we were behind on Maths or English, and we would then devote some time to these—depending, of course, on the suitability of tackling the actual work necessary in the amount of spare time available. If the next lesson happened to be Maths or English, this was all to the good, and we would just start on the next lesson a bit earlier than the time shown on our timetable.

Exams. The examinations were spread over six days, with subjects that involved rather a lot of writing being balanced the same day by those that did not, e.g. History with Recitation and Reading, Creative Writing with Singing, Science with Picture Study, Maths with Painting, etc. Twelve texts were sent to the School for reporting, I used to think it best, as an overseas member, to send to the PNEU School exam papers of the first and last terms of the year and to report on the middle term myself—the first term so that we could have an early report on how things were going, and the last term to see how things were proceeding by the end of the school year.

Subsequent history. E. entered a preparatory school in Hampshire when he was 9½, after 3 years at a Thai kindergarten, 2 years at a missionary school, and 2 years of home schoolroom with the PNEU School. He was placed in Form 4, and after one term the last of the academic year) he moved up to Form 3. Details and final results after the first two terms are given below:

<i>Form</i>	...	...	4th		3rd
<i>Average age</i>	...	...	10.10		11.0
<i>E.'s age</i>	...	...	9.9		10.1
<i>Number in Form</i>			15		15
<i>Subject</i>		%	<i>Form Order</i>	%	<i>Form Order</i>
English	...	53	5th	72	3rd
Mathematics	...	72	5th	71	5th
Latin	...	34	9th	10	14th
French	...	40	11th	36	11th
History	...	53	6th	72	7th
Geography	...	59	5th	70	1st
Science	...	67	4th	79	2nd
All subjects	...	50	8th	54	8th

[p 138]

Comment. At the end of his second term, E. gained over 70 per cent in all subjects, excepting Latin and French. Latin was not in the PNEU syllabus for Form IIb, and though I did give him a lesson a week for the last three terms, he is much below the standard for his present form. In French he also had only one lesson a week, and although this seemed enough at the time, he is not up to the standard of the average in this subject.

Conclusion. In order to allow the teaching of the lessons during the term to proceed smoothly, it was found that a systemic approach to the following matters helped appreciably:

- (a) A card system to help in the ordering, and later checking, of all text books.
- (b) A detailed tabulation of the syllabus by subjects into approximately equal weekly targets.
- (c) The drawing up of a timetable which seemed to divide up the number of periods available to the best advantage vis-a-vis the term's syllabus.
- (d) The subsequent use of the tabulation in (b) above to provide a 'Profile chart' which would give a quick visual indication of progress during the term.

The above methods allowed me to concentrate during the term on the preparation of lessons, the method of teaching, and the actual lessons themselves. The overall satisfactory results obtained, not only during the PNEU terms, but subsequently at an I.A.P.S. preparatory school, seem to show that the PNEU system suited both parent and child, and E. and his parents wish to give due acknowledgement to the Principal and staff of the PNEU School, and to the principles and methods of Charlotte Mason.