




# WHAT DO YOU EXPECT OF A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL?

Early this year scores of mums and dads will be looking forward to the start of another school year; not only because they are getting tired of the school holidays. Early in February, Karen or whatever the name may be—will be starting school. Then life will start in earnest.

**M**um and Dad, and Karen too, have high expectations, because Karen is going to a Christian school! And a parent-controlled one at that!

In the eyes of Mum and Dad, Karen is an intelligent and active child.

Sometimes she is a bit too active, but school will take care of that once Karen is challenged by the demands of learning. It is good that the school is known for its discipline too. Mum and Dad think that is just what Karen needs, because at times she is a bit unruly and becomes a handful for Mum. This is understandable, for Mum has just had another baby who takes up a lot of her time. School will teach Karen to be obedient and considerate! And there is one other thing; Karen tends to get bossy at times – (does she take after her father?) – because when she plays with other children she always seems to take the lead and gets the other children to do what she wants. No



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doubt the Christian school will help her develop her leadership talents. Some of you might think I am exaggerating, but the above expectations are genuine for many parents when their children begin to attend a Christian school. Sometimes parents do not even realise that they are thinking this way. Naturally we must have certain expectations of a Christian school. Otherwise we would not consider sending our children to such a school. The question isn't, "Do we have expectations?" but, "Are these expectations realistic?"

One unrealistic expectation is that Karen is going to change her

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behaviour automatically, since she is now going to a Christian school. The same character traits that manifest themselves at home will also appear at school and cause the same sort of tensions and troubles. This does not mean that the school cannot help; it probably can. If Karen's father and mother discuss their concerns with their teacher, she/he will certainly be willing to cooperate. TOGETHER they can work on the concerns the parents have about Karen. In this way we express one aspect of what it means to be a parent-controlled school; that parents and teachers work together, not in opposition, for the wellbeing and nurture of the child.

## THERE NEEDS TO BE RECIPROCITY BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL.

Karen certainly will learn about 'sin' at school and how we can resist and overcome it in our lives, irrespective of age. Karen will learn about God's forgiveness. She will learn to pray to God for the help of His Spirit so that she may grow into the person that He wants her to be. That teaching must also be upheld in the home, if it is to have any real meaning and influence. Parents need to realise that schooling is closely linked with the process of growth, and that cooperation between teacher and parent should continue for the whole period of schooling if there is to be a lasting effect. This should not be interpreted as the parent 'telling on the child' to the teacher, but rather that the teacher must be placed in a position to reinforce the Christian teaching received at home, as well as the parents reinforcing the teaching received in the school. There needs to be reciprocity between home and school.

You may find this idealistic, and it is! But we need to remember that it

can only be realised if there is close cooperation between parents and teachers. If this is not maintained, the child will perceive a discrepancy between the home and the school and the danger is that the child will adopt a double standard. The same can be said about discipline. If Karen is 'allowed to get away with a lot' at home, she will try to do so at school. If she is disciplined firmly enough at school she will learn that it does not work there. But this basically changes nothing, because Karen's attitude will remain the same, at home I can get away with a lot, but at school I have to be a bit more careful! If we do not get to the root of this problem, that pattern may remain with Karen for the rest of her life. If Karen does not learn to respect authority at home, will she automatically do so at school? No, of course not.

Are you pleased that your child is starting school? What exactly are you expecting school to do for the child? You MUST have some expectations if you enrol your child in a Christian school! You may even be doing this at great financial cost; you may be making a great spiritual, emotional, and moral investment for your child. You wish to fulfil the obligations which you took upon yourself when God entrusted this child into your care. The Christian school is there to help execute that task.

If that is the case, then let the teachers hear about your particular expectations for your child. Take time and talk to the teacher about your concerns, and you will be amazed at what such a discussion can do; you can learn a lot about your child's behaviour and the influence of your own behaviour on your child. It may help you to become a more understanding parent; you will be able to pray more intelligently for your child. It most certainly will help you to see where the teacher can help you and you the teacher. Then you will understand what expectations you CAN have of your Christian school.

A timeless article written by John van der Reest for Nurture, originally published February 1987.