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Educating Your Child at Home

This guide is about educating your child or young person at home. It gives information on you and your child or young person's rights and responsibilities and what help is available.

SEND and You SENDIAS Service is a **free, confidential and impartial** service providing information and support **to children, young people and parents/carers** about special educational needs and disability.

Important things to know

- Most children have their education at school, but some parents choose to educate their children at home. This is called **Elective Home Education (EHE)**. Parents have a legal duty to make sure that if their child is of compulsory school age, they get a suitable education.
- Legally, you don't need to register or get approval from the local authority (LA) to educate your child at home, except if your child is at a special school.
- Once you decide to home educate, **it's helpful to tell your Local Authority**. They may give you information, advice and support.
- There are lots of organisations, websites and groups that can support you. But, there is no general financial help for resources, tuition, support and activities.
- If your child has an **EHC plan**, you may be able home educate. However, you **must** tell the school and the local authority and they **must** review the EHC plan every year to make sure your child's needs are being met.
- If your **child is at a special school** you will need to seek **permission** from the local authority if you wish to remove them from the school roll and home educate.
- If you've been **home educating** and it's **no longer working**, then you can **arrange for your child to go back into school**. It can sometimes be difficult for children to re-adjust, so it's important to talk about it with your child and plan well.

- If you wish your child to **return to mainstream** you will need to follow **admissions procedures** (or discuss at an EHC plan annual review) and find out what places are available.
- Home educated children are **not eligible for any public health programme that is delivered through schools**, e.g. routine vaccination programmes or school nurse support. Parents would need to seek this through their GP.
- Making the decision to home educate can be a big one for any family and it can affect lots of areas of family life. It's important to think it through and explore all your choices.
- If your child isn't managing at school, or if you think they might be at risk of being permanently excluded, you shouldn't feel pressurised into home educating.
- If you have a **child with special educational needs or a disability**, and want to find out more about your options, you can **get advice from SEND and You or your Local Authority**.

"The responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. In England, education is compulsory, but school is not."

Department for Education guidance

What is Elective Home Education (EHE)?

Elective home education is what the Department for Education calls a **parent's decision to teach their children at home** instead of sending them to school. This is **different to home tuition** that might be given by a local authority, or education provided by a local authority somewhere other than a school.

There are lots of **reasons why parents choose home education**, such as:

- Religious or cultural beliefs
- A child is being bullied
- Being unhappy or not liking the school system
- A short term plan, because their child is unable or unwilling to go to school
- Having a closer relationship with their children
- Having a child that may have or has special educational needs and is struggling with school, or a parent feels their needs aren't being met
- The school that they want for their child doesn't have places.

Section 7 EA 1996

7 Duty of parents to secure education of children of compulsory school age.

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable—

- (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and*
 - (b) to any special educational needs he may have,*
- either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.*

Your Responsibilities

Parents must make sure that, if their child is of **compulsory school age**, they get an appropriate **full-time education**. This is the law.

Compulsory school age: This is when a child's education must start and finish. In the UK it's from the start of the school term following their **fifth birthday**, until the **last Friday in June in the school year when they reach 16**. If your child's 16th birthday is in July or August, compulsory school age ends on the June date before their birthday.

Full time: A child in school should get **between 21 and 25 hours of education a week**, depending on how old they are. However, **home education is very different** to going to school, and there are no rules that say a child should get a certain number of hours each week. [The EHE Guidelines](#) recognise that **descriptions of a 'full time' education are not appropriate in relation to EHE**, where education may be taking place on a more continuous or one to one basis.

Raising Participation: All 16 year olds must remain in education or training until their 18th birthday. They can have that education at a college or sixth form, as part of an apprenticeship or at home. LA's track young people aged 16 and 17 (or older if they have an EHC plan) and may contact them to see what education is in place for them.

Virtual Learning

Some home educated children and young people use **virtual learning (online classes or tuition)**. Most virtual learning needs to be paid for. Not all online learning is Ofsted inspected.

There are a small number of virtual learning centres that are **approved alternative education providers**. Access to funding for these courses would need to be agreed by the LA (e.g. if a student has severe medical needs).

Local Authority Checks

If you decide to teach your child at home, you'll be responsible for their education. The local authority may make an **'informal enquiry'** from time to time to check that what you're teaching them is suitable and good enough.

If they think that it isn't, they will send a **written notice** asking you to satisfy the LA that the child is receiving suitable education. If they are still not satisfied you could end up being given a school attendance order. This means you won't be able to home educate, but instead you will have to register your child at a school that the local authority names. If you don't follow what's set out in a school attendance order you can be taken to court.

How do I decide whether home education is right for us?

Moving to home education is a big decision for any parent or family, and it can affect lots of areas of family life. So, it's important to think it through carefully and look at all your choices.

Think about **how long** you're going to **home educate**. You may think your child would benefit from a few months or a year of home education, but then you would want them to go back to school. Or, you might decide you want to keep your child out of school completely.

Take as much time as you can to think carefully about the main issues, including the possible pros and cons. It's a good idea to **talk to your child and other family members or friends** about what being at home might mean. Some people also find it helpful to talk to other parents who are already home educating.

Here are some of the main **advantages and disadvantages**:

- Teaching your child at home gives you lots of **control over what they learn** and when and how they are learning. You don't need to have any teaching qualification, follow a fixed timetable, give formal lessons, stick to school hours or follow a National Curriculum. You can travel, teach outdoors, use online learning or join groups or classes. You will need to make sure your child is getting a **broad and balanced education**. That means you'll need to teach them about a wide range of different things. **You'll need to plan what to teach, check how well they're learning and monitor their progress**. You may also have to find resources and research topic areas.
- **You're the expert on your child**, so you should be able to meet their needs well and you can give lots of support and attention. You'll also be spending a lot of time every day with your child. That can bring you closer together, but it can also be hard, especially if their behaviour is challenging or they find it hard to focus.
- Most parents aren't qualified teachers, so **you'll be learning new skills**. You may need a good level of knowledge, especially as your child gets older when they may be learning at a higher level. You may choose to use tutors or online courses.

You will be responsible for checking that tutors are well qualified, follow safeguarding procedures and that exam courses are recognised nationally.

- **LA's have no duty to provide financial support to parents who choose elective home education.** That means you may be paying for resources, equipment, books, trips and exams. Home education takes a lot of time and that may affect your work life – in fact, you not be able to work at all.

- **School life for a child is about more than education.** At school your child is mixing with others, building relationships, belonging to a community and learning social skills. These are important life skills, so you'll need to think about how you're going to help your child develop these. There are lots of social groups for home educated children in and around the South West. See www.homeeducationsw.org.uk for more information.

- **If your child has complicated or specific learning difficulties, you might need specialist support to help them learn:** getting advice and help from specialists can be hard when your child isn't in school and if you're on a budget, going private may be expensive.

Home education may not be the only choice if school is hard for your child and they're not managing, or if you think they might be at risk of being permanently excluded. If you want to find out more about your options, you can talk to your Local Authority or your child's SENCO, you can contact our support line.

Who do I need to tell if I decide to home educate my child?

Legally, you don't need to register or get the local authority to agree if you want to teach your child at home, except if your child is at a special school. If your child isn't in school, the local authority might ask how you're educating them. Many **parents find it helpful to tell the local authority that they're home educating** (there's information about this at the end of this guide).

Some parents choose to home educate when their child is young, so they may never be in the school system. **If your child is on roll (registered) at a school and you decide to take them out to home educate, then you must tell the head teacher in writing.** This will help to prevent any mix-ups about why your child isn't at school. If your child is at a special school you will need to seek permission from the LA to remove them.

Only one parent needs to give their go ahead for their child to be taken off a school's roll. This is the parent that a child lives with. If you and your child's other parent can't agree about whether they should be taken off a school roll, the family court will make a legal decision about it.

The head teacher should tell the LA what you've decided. If you are taking your child out of mainstream school completely, the head teacher must accept your decision. However, they

can refuse if you want to send your child to school some of the time and home educate for the rest. This is called **flexi-schooling** and only some schools may agree to it.

What happens then?

Once **the LA knows you're home educating your child, they will send you information and an adviser may offer to come and visit you and your child at home.** You don't have to have a home visit - you could meet somewhere else or give examples of what you're doing with your child another way. You are under no duty to respond to requests for information from the LA or meet with them but the EHE guidelines confirm it would be sensible to do so.

At a home visit, the adviser will talk to you about the education you're giving your child. You can show them examples of work, resources, timetables and anything else you think will show what you're doing. It's helpful to keep a record of the work you've done, the visits you go on and the progress your child is making.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan

- If your child is at a mainstream school you can remove your child's name from the school register by giving written notice but your child will need an annual review to discuss the changes. If the local authority decides that the education you're giving is suitable, it should change the EHC plan to name the type of school that would be suitable, but say that parents have made their own arrangements (under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996).

- If your child is **at a special school the LA must give permission** for the child's name to be removed from the admissions register so that they can then be home educated. If the LA refuses to grant this permission, a declaration from the Secretary of State can be sought.

If the LA agree, your child should have an annual review to discuss any changes to the plan and you would have a right to appeal any changes. The LA will specify a type of school or college which would be suitable in section I of the EHC plan, but they would also specify that you are making "suitable alternative arrangements" for the child or young person's education.

What about EHC plan special educational provision?

The local authority doesn't have to provide what's in the EHC plan as long as they're sure what you're providing is suitable.

If there are **therapies or special educational provision specified in the EHC plan** that you wish the LA to provide please **seek further advice.** Unless the plan specifies that your child requires '**education otherwise than in a school or college**' you may need to pay for these yourselves.

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 says that the LA can choose to offer financial contributions though the SEND high needs funding block towards special educational provision but they are under no duty to do so.

If the LA feels you are not making suitable arrangements for special educational provision then they would be open to name a school or college within the EHC plan and take action if you chose not to send your child to that school. You would have a right to appeal any changes made to an EHC plan but, if an attendance order is issued, that cannot be appealed through the SEND tribunal.

You can still seek support through your local authority for social care services such as short breaks. You can also seek help for health services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health and speech and language therapy.

How can I contact my Local Authority?

Bristol:

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/schools-learning-early-years/elective-home-education>

North Somerset:

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/my-services/schools-learning/home-education/elective-home-education/>

South Gloucestershire:

<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools-and-education/behaviour-and-attendance/educating-your-child-at-home/>

How do I get specialist advice or an assessment?

If your child has an EHC plan, you can ask for an **educational psychology assessment** if it is necessary. Children who are being assessed for an EHC **plan** will have an **educational psychology assessment**. You can ask for other specialist assessments or advice, for example about communication or hearing problems if you have evidence that this is needed. You can do this as part of the assessment process or a review of an EHC plan.

You can still apply for an EHC assessment of need if you feel your child needs an EHC plan.

If your child doesn't have an EHC plan and doesn't need an EHC assessment, you'll have to arrange and pay for this kind of assessment and advice yourself. You can apply for health or social care assessments through the normal routes.

'Off Rolling'

Ofsted defines off-rolling as “**the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil**”.

If you think you are being pressured to home educate or remove your child from a school please contact your LA or Supportive Parents for advice.

What if I am thinking of home educating because my child is too ill to go to school?

If your child is of compulsory age (or college age with exams to take) and is too ill to attend school then the local authority has a duty to make arrangements for them. LA's should generally take responsibility for the child's education once their absence is expected to be 15 days or more. Any provision, e.g. home tuition, should be put into place as soon as possible.

LA's should work closely with medical professionals to find out what is appropriate for the child's condition. They should not unnecessarily demand continuing evidence from a consultant, without good reason, even where a child has long term health issues.

They should work closely with parents and carers and plan your child's reintegration to school at the end of any absence.

Some LA's have a medical education service to support students who are too ill to attend school. Referral to these services is usually via a medical professional such as a paediatrician or CAMHS.

For more information see the DfE guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/illness-child-education>

What if I am thinking of home educating because my child is school refusing or they are not meeting my child's needs?

School refusal can result from many different things. **Talk to your child's school as soon as possible** to see if they can put a **plan of support** into place. This may involve gathering information about your child, looking at patterns and triggers, looking at friendships and your child's sense of belonging and environment factors such as morning routine. You may wish to ask for a key worker to communicate with you and your child each day.

School refusal may be a sign that a child is very anxious or has a mental health issue. Mental health issues that prevent a child from attending school should be considered in the same way as medical conditions (see above). You should **seek medical advice** as soon as possible. Your GP may be able to write to the school to explain your child's absence so they are marked as ill rather than unauthorised absence. They may also make a referral to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service).

If you cannot get suitable medical advice but you really cannot get your child to school e.g. because their behaviour is severe, the LA may still have a duty to arrange alternative education (see <https://www.ipsea.org.uk/r-on-the-application-of-y-v-croydon-lbc-2015-ewhc-3033-admin-2016-elr-138>)

School refusal may also a sign that that the school are not meeting a special educational need or making reasonable adaptations for a disability.

If your child is refusing to attend school **contact your local authority** as soon as possible to try to avoid prosecution. If you think your child may have undiagnosed or un-met special educational needs or a disability and your child does not have an EHC plan you may wish to make a request for an EHC needs assessment. Please contact Supportive Parents for further details.

If your child has an **EHC plan** you may wish to **ask for an emergency review** to consider amendments to the plan so that it better suits the needs of your child. You may need to information added such as mental health needs. Supportive Parents can help you to prepare for annual reviews.

It may be appropriate for the LA to exercise their general duty to provide home tuition for a period of time or to consider educating your child in an alternative provision.

Schools and LA's must not force you to home educate your child because of school refusal. Please contact Supportive Parents if you feel under pressure to deregister your child.

What if I am thinking of home educating because my child keeps being excluded?

Exclusions can be the result of a school not meeting a child's needs or undiagnosed special educational needs or disability. Schools should not exclude (send children home) because they cannot support a child's special educational need. If your child does not have an EHC plan you may wish to ask for an EHC assessment. If they do have an EHC plan you may need to ask for an early review. Please contact Supportive Parents for more advice.

Can someone who is home educated take formal exams?

Yes. Your child or young person can take exams such as GCSEs and A Levels. You'll have to pay the exam fees and contact exam boards and nearby exam centres. Make sure you know well in advance how this will work for your child. There may be additional charges if your child has access requirements (such as needing a scribe). If a GCSE or A level requires a practical assessment you will need to consider how this can be done.

Further Information:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education

If you have any further questions or would like support please contact our support line on 0117 989 7725 or email support@sendandyou.org.uk



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