DOWN'S SYNDROME ASSOCIATION
your expert education partner
you can count on us

HOME EDUCATION

This information sheet relates to Northern Ireland only

In Northern Ireland, each parent has a legal duty to ensure that their child receives an education and whilst education is compulsory for every child, attendance at school is not. Educating children at home can be a suitable solution and can work well when it is carried out with a proper regard for the needs of the child. You can teach your child at home, either full or part-time. This is called home education (sometimes 'elective home education' or 'home schooling').

If your child is currently at school, you should deregister your child from school by letter, informing the Principal of the school of your intention to home educate and asking for your child to be removed from their school register. This letter must include the date from which you will start elective home education and needs to bear a parent's signature/someone with parental responsibility. The school will engage in a discussion about the implications of this choice. They cannot legally prevent or delay the de-registration of a child once formally notified by the parent. Future re-registration at the same school might not be possible if the school is selective or over-subscribed.
If you are removing your child from a special school you will also need to let the Education Authority know.

Schools should offer constructive support to children transitioning to home education, including providing curriculum materials or short term loan of text books. They should also provide a brief written report on the child's progress and attainment.

If your child is not enrolled at school, you do not need to inform the Education Authority that you are educating your child at home. However, they might contact you to ask how you are educating your child.

Once a child is educated at home, the Education Authority will begin making enquiries as to how suitable the education being provided is. It doesn't mean that you must deliver the same type of education that would be provided in school, but you must make sure that the education you provide is suitable for your child/ren. The education you provide must be age-appropriate, enable the child to make progress according to his or her level of ability, and should take account of any specific aptitudes or special educational needs. If it appears that a child is not receiving a suitable education, the EA might serve a school attendance order.

You may be asked to provide information about the Educational Philosophy you are using, your approach to assessments, examples of your child's work, reports from educational visits, journals of activity, project plans and educational plans. The Education Authority will want to see that parents and carers are playing a significant role in their child's education, that the provision takes into account the child's views, there are a range of opportunities, resources and materials being used, and there is appropriate opportunity for interaction with other children and adults.

Home Education and Special Educational Needs

'Special educational needs' is a legal definition and refers to children with learning challenges or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children the same age. Parents can educate their child at home even if they have Special Educational Needs, whether they have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or not, including if they have attended a Special School. The process of de-registration is the same for all children.

In the case of a child with a Statement of Special Educational Needs, the EA will maintain this statement and shall arrange that the special educational provision indicated in the statement is made for the child unless the child's parent has made suitable arrangements (Article 16 (5) of the Education (NI) Order 1996).

The EA in your region must review your child's statement at least once a year, checking your child's progress and making sure that the statement continues to meet their needs. It may be appropriate, if the child's special needs are being met without any additional support from the EA, for the statement to be ceased.

If your child does not have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, you can request the EA in your region to assess your child to see whether it would be appropriate for them to have one.

Curriculum

You are not expected to teach the Northern Ireland Curriculum though you may choose to do so. You also do not need to follow a timetable or have set hours in which education will take place. You do not need to be a qualified teacher or give formal lessons. However, it might be helpful to have a structure in place.

It can be helpful to make links with other home educating families to prevent your child becoming socially isolated.

We have compiled some free teaching resources and Speech & Language therapy videos which you might find useful:

Scope also provides a range of online resources and activities

Potential benefits of home education

- **Flexibility re the timetable, allowing you to include breaks when needed or repeating lessons/content as required**
- **You can adapt the teaching to your child's interests, pace of learning and preferred learning approaches**
- **You can provide one-to-one teaching**
- **Siblings and other home-schooled children can provide peer support**
- **You may feel it is a safer and more welcoming environment for your child**
- **You can instil your values, beliefs and ethics into the teaching**
- **It might help you achieve a better home/work balance**
- **Therapies can be provided in the home**
- **There may be fewer distractions in the family home**
- **You can incorporate life skills into your teaching**
- **You will get to see what your child can achieve, and also what they are still struggling with to allow a more personalised approach**
- **It can boost a child's confidence when the focus is on what they can do and achieve**

Important considerations relating to home education

- **It will require significant commitment from you as parents and it can be physically and emotionally demanding**
- **It may result in a loss of income for the family if you have to give up your job or work part time**
- **You will need to provide opportunities for socialising and making friends**
- **You might also feel isolated**
- **Lack of professional support and input**
- **It can be expensive, especially if specialist resources are needed. You are also responsible for any exam fees**
- **It can be hard for some children to distinguish between home and school time when both are in the same setting**
- **You might feel you do not possess expertise or knowledge in all of the topics**

For further information

Elective Home Education guidelines 2020

Education Authority SEN Helpline

SEN Inclusion Service for Down Syndrome

SENAS advises on the Northern Ireland statutory SEN system.

Home Education Northern Ireland is a parent-led group providing information about home education.

If you would like to receive further information about elective home education please contact the Down's Syndrome Association Helpline on 0333 121 2300 (10am-4pm) or email info@downs-syndrome.org.uk and we would be delighted to provide further information.

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