HOME EDUCATION

This information sheet relates to Wales only

Home education is a term used to describe when parents and carers educate their children at home instead of sending them to school. In Wales, as with the rest of the UK, education is compulsory, but school is not. The best interests of the child should be at the heart of decision making by both local authorities and schools. When considering how best to a support a child, it is important to recognise that school may not be suitable for every child.

Most parents and carers choose to educate their children by sending them to school, where the state will take on financial responsibility for the child's education. Others choose to home educate instead. Parents who choose to home-educate their children must be prepared to assume full financial responsibility, including bearing the cost of any public examinations.

However local authorities are encouraged to provide support where resources permit. Parents may decide to home educate their child from a very early age and so the child may not have been previously enrolled at school. They may also decide to home educate at any stage up to the end of compulsory school age.

However, the right to home education is not absolute. It is conditional on you providing your child with a full-time, 'efficient' and 'suitable' education (see paragraph 1.6 of this document), as per section 7 of the Education Act 1996, which states:

'The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable
(a) to his age, ability, aptitude, and
(b) to any special educational needs … he may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.'

You do not need permission from the local authority to home educate (unless your child is registered at a special school). You do not have to follow a curriculum, although it may be a useful reference. What learning opportunities you provide and how your child learns are up to you, providing that the education you provide is 'full-time', 'suitable' and 'efficient'. Education must be suitable to the age, ability and aptitudes of the child, and any additional learning needs (or special educational needs) they may have.

Local authorities should provide clear and accurate written information on their home education policies on their website on a page specifically for home education, including contact details for home education support organisations where available.

Local authorities should provide parents who are, or who are considering, home educating with a named contact within the authority, who is familiar with home education policy and practice and who has an understanding of a range of educational philosophies and a link to/copy of Welsh Government's Handbook for Home Educators.

Local authorities must make arrangements to identify children not receiving a suitable education. If the local authority is not reassured that you are providing a suitable education, due to, for example, a lack of information provided by you or the information you have provided does not make it clear that the education is suitable and efficient, the local authority will continue to engage with you to provide that information.

The local authority has to be satisfied that the education that is being provided is suitable for the 'age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that your child may have'. The evidence you present is looked at it in this light.

There is currently no legal definition of what 'full-time' education is. For home educating families, there can be almost continuous one-to-one or small group contact and education may take place outside normal 'school hours'. The question of whether education for a specific child is full-time will depend on the circumstances of each case, but as parents and carers you should at least be able to quantify and demonstrate the amount of time for which your child is being educated. Education which is clearly not occupying a significant proportion of a child's life will probably not meet the 'full-time' requirement.

It is essential that deciding to home educate is your choice. You should never be encouraged by the school to home educate because of your child's poor behaviour, poor attainment or poor attendance. This is especially so if you are influenced to home educate to avoid permanent exclusion or prosecution due to non-school attendance.

What to do if you decide to educate your child at home

If your child is in school, you should write to the headteacher notifying them of your intention to take responsibility for your child's education and to remove them from the register. The headteacher will then remove your child's name from the register and notify the local authority. If you simply remove your child from school without informing them in writing you could be prosecuted for their non-attendance.

If your child attends a special school, you will need to obtain permission from the local authority before removing them from the school roll and you should ask the local authority to amend your child's statement or review their Individual Development Plan (IDP).

If your child has never attended school, no notification is required. However, the Welsh Government strongly recommends contacting your local authority to let them know you are educating your child at home so they can get in touch and offer you support.

Children with special educational needs (SEN)/additional learning needs (ALN)

Children with SEN/ALN, have significantly greater difficulty learning than the majority of others of the same age, and may face barriers to learning. They may, therefore, take longer to process information and develop new skills, and may find it difficult to interact with other people. The type and level of SEN/ALN can vary significantly. For example, some children may have specific learning difficulties, which affect only one or two areas of their learning such as reading, writing or understanding what is said to them. Others, however, may have profound and multiple learning difficulties which affect their level of personal independence. For these learners progress is likely to be made in very small steps and in very subtle ways.

Parents can home educate a child who has a statement of SEN or an Individual Development Plan, (IDP).

A local authority preparing or reviewing an IDP for a home educated child, should work with the child and child's parent to identify the appropriate Additional Learning Plan, (ALP), and then secure it. This involves identifying the type of ALP called for by the child's needs and whether the parent will be able to deliver it (either directly or by arranging for someone else to deliver it). Subsequently, if the parent is to deliver it as part of the child's home education, in order to secure the ALP set out in the IDP, the local authority will need to satisfy itself that it is being delivered. Where parents are not able to provide all of the ALP called for by the child's needs, the local authority will need to consider how the ALP can be secured.

Section 14 of the Additional Learning Needs Act sets out that where a local authority maintains an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for a child or a young person, the local authority must secure the additional learning provision (ALP) described in the plan. This does not mean the local authority has to directly provide the ALP. Where, for example, the IDP sets out the ALP as being one-to-one support, this could be provided by a parent home educating the child. Where a child requires specialist provision, the local authority would need to decide whether it would be reasonable for the support to be provided in the child's home or whether, for example, the provision needs to be made in a school or a specialist educational setting. The local authority is responsible for ensuring the ALP is being delivered. This would be assessed as part of the IDP review undertaken by the local authority, which must be conducted annually or more frequently if appropriate.

Until a child moves to the new ALN system, the SEN legislation (Part 4 of the Education Act 1996) remains in force in relation to the child and special educational provision (SEP) must continue to be provided by the local authority as per the statement of SEN.

Parents/carers of a home educated child who does not have a statement of SEN/Individual Development Plan may ask the local authority to conduct a statutory assessment of the child's educational needs. The local authority shall make and maintain an Individual Development Plan if necessary following such an assessment.

Flexi-schooling

Flexi-schooling is an arrangement where, following a formal request from you and with the approval of the headteacher at the school, a child spends some part of the week attending school and the rest of it being educated at home. It is important to note that flexi-schooling is not home education. In such arrangements, the child will always continue to remain on the school roll. This may be a better alternative to home education if you wish to educate your child at home but cannot or do not want to do so full-time.

You are fully entitled to ask schools about possible arrangements for flexi-schooling. There is, however, no entitlement to flexi-schooling and the decision to agree it or not rests entirely with the headteacher. If the headteacher agrees with your request, then the days that the child is educated at home will be recorded as authorised absence. If a school decides not to agree such an arrangement, there is no formal appeal process.

Curriculum

Children who are home educated are not required to follow the Basic curriculum for Wales/Curriculum for Wales or any other specified curriculum or meet criteria for the number of learning hours.

There are many different approaches to providing home education. For example, some parents and carers feel that their child will learn through experience, with the educator as a helper and guide, using the child's experience as a basis for learning. Other parents and carers choose to educate their children in a way that mirrors a school timetable, with areas of learning and experience taught in a more formal way and with a clear syllabus that may include targets for their children to achieve.

The home education approach can be anywhere on a continuum from a formal, structured, schedule-based and mostly within the home environment, through to autonomous or child-led education. Moreover, it can vary over time and subject. For example, a child might move from a more autonomous approach when younger to one that is more structured for GCSEs (if the child chooses to sit them). Over the course of a year, home education may be more structured throughout the winter and more responsive to the weather or local opportunities during the summer. Some subjects like mathematics may be delivered with a structured approach, while others like history by an autonomous project.

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

The Welsh Government provides additional useful information about the legislative framework:

Elective home education guidance

Home education: handbook for home educators

Additional Learning Needs Code

Curriculum for Wales guidance

SNAP Cymru (free and independent information about SEN)

Wales 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.

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