

Part time schooling for children under 5 in England

Formal flexischooling does not apply until children reach compulsory school age (CSA) which is the school term after a child turns 5. Up until this point the term used is 'part time' and the attendance requirements are as follows:

The Law in England

In December 2014 the Schools Admissions Code (England) was updated. Children under compulsory school age can now attend part time if the parents so wish. Children are marked absent using code X which means school attendance records are not affected. Below is an extract from page 24 of the Code.

2.16 Admission authorities must provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday. The authority must make it clear in their arrangements that, where they have offered a child a place at a school:

- a) that child is entitled to a full-time place in the September following their fourth birthday;*
- b) the child's parents can defer the date their child is admitted to the school until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age and not beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year for which it was made; and*
- c) where the parents wish, children may attend part-time until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age.*

Compulsory school age is set out in section 8 of the Education Act 1996 and the Education (Start of Compulsory School Age) Order 1998. A child reaches compulsory school age on the prescribed day following his or her fifth birthday (or on his or her fifth birthday if it falls on a prescribed day). The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August.

Clarification on the term 'part time' was requested from the Department of Education and the response from Sarah Hamilton, School Admissions, was as follows:

Thank you for your email. It has always been the intention that children who are not yet of compulsory school age should be able to attend school part time where this is what parents want – since children who are not of compulsory school age obviously cannot be required to attend school. We made the recent amendments to the Code because we realised it wasn't being interpreted in his way. We would, however, expect parents to work with their school to agree a pattern of attendance which the parent feels meets the child's needs whilst enabling the school to provide them with a meaningful experience.

The new School Admissions Code came into force on 19 December, except where a different start date is stated within individual provisions of the Code. However, on this issue, whilst the wording has changed the underlying requirement hasn't. The Code applies to all publicly funded schools – academies, free schools and local authority maintained schools.

Feel free to share this information with your local council, and they are welcome to contact me if they would find that helpful.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Can the school specify which days and times a child will attend part time?**

Schools may tell parents what part time arrangements they would like the child to attend but, on the basis there is no legal requirement for the child to be in school, this cannot be enforced. It is however, well worthwhile trying to work with the school to come up with an arrangement which suits both parents and school as there are many years ahead and a good relationship is beneficial to all parties.
- **Will my child suffer socially because they aren't full time like the other children?**

This will depend on the child and the classmates. It is often raised as a concern by teachers but is generally a much smaller issue than they may have you believe. At nursery and playgroup most children attend part time and this is considered normal. The children have got used to friends being there some days and not others. Lunchtime clubs mean that children miss various playtimes and then of course sickness means that children can be off at various times. Friends being absent sometimes is a normal part of school.

If it is a concern to you then attending half days and staying for lunch means children are at school for the main play times. Arranging play dates after school can help build stronger friendships as well.
- **Will my child suffer academically because they aren't attending full time?**

This is possible if a child misses significant parts of the school week. It can easily be resolved however by talking to the school and understanding what topics are being covered, when and how. This way parents can work out if there are parts of the week where it would be beneficial for their child to attend. Many schools cover academic subjects in the mornings and would prefer children to attend then. There may also be regular times in the week when new concepts / topics are introduced and it could be useful for a child to be there at those time. A little bit of compromising may be the answer so that both sides feel the part time arrangement can work well.

Work missed at school can be covered much quicker 1:1 at home if parents feel it would be helpful to do work at home.

Formal Flexischooling over 5

Once a child reaches 5, part time attendance is no longer a right by law. Flexischooling is however an option which can be requested. This is the head teacher's decision and more information can be found in the **Flexischooling for Parents (Information sheet 1)** and **Flexischooling for Head Teachers (Information sheet 5)** leaflets. The time that your child is attending part time in reception can be a great opportunity to show how well this arrangement could work into the future. If you are considering flexischooling building a good relationship with the school and working closely with them is well worth while during this part time period.