

## Flexischooling Information for Parents Negotiating with Schools

*Please note flexischooling should not be confused with part time attendance for children under 5. For this please read leaflet no. 3 Part time schooling for children under 5*

### First communications

We strongly urge that you direct your enquiries to the head teacher, as this avoids your approach getting halted by office gatekeepers.

Writing a brief covering letter that is short and to the point is a good idea. Rambling letters rarely lead to good meetings. Save the detail for the meeting. Enclose the Information sheets “Is Flexischooling Legal” (No 2) and “Flexischooling Information for Head Teachers” (No 5), both available in the Flexischooling section of our website. This gives them information to prepare for the meeting. It makes sense to send the head teacher this information in both hard copy and electronic versions so they can use whichever they prefer. You could also direct them to the Flexischooling section of our website.

The head teacher is ultimately the person who will agree, or deny, your request. Most head teachers will probably be unaware of flexischooling, or at least its legality, so providing them with good information is helpful.

It is probable that the head teacher will also want to take the advice of the local authority as they take due diligence and assure themselves that flexischooling is a possibility. Under ideal circumstances local authorities would have authoritative knowledge about flexischooling but sadly, most haven't. They often give inaccurate advice, sometimes because they don't know about flexischooling and sometimes because they disapprove of flexischooling. Ultimately it is not for the local authority to decide, because the decision belongs, in law, to the head teacher.

### Face to face Meeting

Personal communication is essential if confidence and trust is to be built. Make an appointment to meet with the head teacher and ensure there is sufficient time to discuss flexischooling. Although you may be knowledgeable, and perhaps passionate, about flexischooling please don't assume the head teacher will be. The idea may be totally new to them and therefore presents a challenge. Bear in mind that even if the head teacher is convinced by your arguments they will also need to speak to and bring on board the appropriate class teacher(s). If all parties are not on board any arrangements can easily break down.

Try to understand the head teacher's concerns. This will enable you to work more effectively with the head to find solutions. This may seem daunting but the information you have already sent them holds the keys to your arguments and most head teachers would be prepared to engage in a dialogue and look into this further. Rehearse the arguments – include practicalities, why you want to flexischool, how it works and how you will be able to show it is working

## Confidence, trust, commitment

We can't overstate the importance of a strong personal relationship with the school that provides the class teacher and head teacher with an underpinning of trust. In the context of current schooling and the pressures on teachers there will be adjustments to be made. In one sense, a school could just say 'why should we put ourselves out when we already have so much on our plate.' If you appreciate this and show your understanding of the school's position things will go better.

If your children are home educated you may well need to do some groundwork in breaking the usual embedded home educated stereotypes. The likelihood is you are well used to these arguments anyway. This is important learning for school staff and a worthwhile engagement in itself.

Even if you've convinced the head teacher to go ahead with a flexischooling trial it's in your interests to invest time in building the core relationship with your child's class teacher. If the rapport here is good then it is likely that other staff and the head teacher will be receiving good reports and more likely to be happy with flexischooling continuing in future years.

## Curriculum and learning

Currently schools are driven by the need to meet assessment targets and deliver a prescribed curriculum. This means that school timetables are far more rigid than they may have been in the past. Therefore the school may require your child to attend on certain days or sessions that fit with the timetable. Whilst that may not be your ideal you may need to compromise to get things off the ground.

## Common concerns raised by school and others

- *Lack of progress / falling behind.* This rather depends what you are looking for from the school. If it's the basics i.e. maths / literacy where rigid timetabled progressions operate, then you will need to discuss the timetable to ensure attendance at relevant times. You should also discuss how learning will be supported and developed at home. On the other hand, if it's the non-core curriculum and social experiences available in school that motivate you to seek a flexischooling arrangement, there may be greater flexibility and less concern.
- *Socialisation.* An often expressed but thoroughly unwarranted concern. There is no evidence that flexischoolers are any less socialised than their full-time peers. Most socialisation in school is established in the playground, in clubs and extra-curricular activities. Play dates after school and at the weekends can also strengthen friendships. If your child is already at the school then friendships will already be established. Indeed it should be remembered that school is not the only source of friendship and a child attending school full time still has more hours out of school than in school.
- *Opening the floodgates.* This is the belief that when one family flexischools then many others will want to try it. In our experience this is not the case. It is rare for existing full time pupils to switch to flexischooling but the school may attract additional pupils when parents who have been seeking flexischooling learn that this school allows it. The very rare schools that have a large proportion of flexischoolers are small rural schools who were previously undersubscribed.

## Benefits to the school and the child

Be able to rehearse the benefits of flexischooling not only for your child and family but for the school. These are outlined in our briefing documents and on the website.

The school will get full time funding, better motivated learners and parents who are both proactive and committed. Be able to share what you think your child will bring to the class and school. Children starting later to school or coming from home education can often be more self-reliant, independent, good talkers, questioners, critical thinkers, socially adept across the age ranges etc

Flexischooling means the education can be more personalised to the child, enabling them to thrive mentally, socially, physically and intellectually.

You may have a child with special needs. Schools have the same responsibilities as they have for any registered pupil with special needs. Evidence is growing that for some children with autism, and some other special needs, flexischooling is the best option.

## Tour of the School

(If your child is not currently attending the school). Either as part of your initial meeting or soon after it would make sense to arrange a tour of the school with your child. It's important for you to get a feel of the school (rather than just the rhetoric of prospectus and conversation) and it is essential your child can see for themselves and be drawn into any decision that may be made.

## Contracts

Clarity is essential and a contract or agreement is a good way of defining this.

A contract or agreement may cover

- Roles and responsibilities of both school and parents
- Curriculum (including how much National Curriculum is studied)
- Oversight of home-based learning,
- Arrangements for assessment,
- Special needs,
- Welfare and safeguarding,
- Flexibilities regarding special events
- Review (regular, recurring)
- Termination arrangements
- Arrangements for SATs
- Anything else that either party feels is important

There is contract guidance on our website and a number of sample contract templates within our documentation that could be used or construct your own.

## **Expectations**

You should retain realistic expectations and not assume that you can dominate communication with the class teacher and head teacher. Teachers are relentlessly busy and may be unable to offer you much of their time.

## **Review and celebration**

This might occur informally in some circumstances on a daily basis, however, formal review opportunities are essential. This may need to be half-termly at least at in the early days, but certainly termly. This enables both parties to give honest appraisal of how things are going and suggest adaptations and a plan to move forward. Reviews also give opportunities to celebrate progress and affirm the arrangement. In some circumstances and with mutual agreement, a home-school notebook or email exchange may be a good way of sharing information. However, be aware that class teachers may not have time to complete these regularly.

## **Finally**

Flexischooling can be win: win for all parties and has the potential in less constrained times to be transformational in the way schools work.