

Flexischooling in England - Information for head teachers

What is flexischooling?

Flexischooling is an arrangement where a learner is registered at school and has a full-time education, but is educated partly in a school setting (primary or secondary) and partly elsewhere (commonly home-based). It can be a long or short-term arrangement. Flexischooling is a local agreement between the school (head teacher) and families. It is a legal option but, there is no right to flexischool. This is at the discretion of the school (head teacher).

Flexischooling 5-19

There are examples of flexischooling across the age-range and in a variety of diverse settings. In some, there will be just one or two children flexischooling, in others, flexischoolers will be in greater numbers up to and including those where the majority of pupils are flexischooled. Such settings can justifiably be labelled as a flexischool.

Part-time schooling pre-compulsory school age

Flexischooling is not to be conflated with part-time schooling prior to compulsory school age. This is a parental right and must be accommodated by schools (DfE Admissions Code 2014 Section 2.16). See also our briefing sheet Part time schooling for children under 5 in England.

The Flexischooling Continuum

Flexischooling sits along a continuum. At its simplest it is a basic flexitime arrangement where the school-based and home-based learning are discrete. The mainstream education system has traditionally accommodated this to some extent with nursery and early years' provision. There are also examples of some secondary schools who offer flexitime contracts to students who earn the right to study away from school for periods.

So, even at this end of the continuum, flexischooling begins to question some basic assumptions about schooling, accepting:

- a single location is not essential
- parents can have an active role
- children / young people can learn without teachers being present
- facilitating learning is as much part of teaching as formal instruction
- resources at home/elsewhere both physical and virtual can be utilised
- uniqueness of individuals / individual learning dispositions can be respected and accommodated

At the more transformational end of the spectrum, flexischooling can go further in confronting notions about schooling and traditional views of learning. This type of flexischooling recognises the rapidly changing world, the ubiquitous availability and ease of knowledge access, and the complexities of life and behaviour. It recognises that flexible people develop a wider range of coping strategies and are better equipped for life in the modern world and workplace. Flexibility in all dimensions is then the key.

Why do parents choose flexischooling?

Families may approach schools for a variety of reasons. They can be philosophical where they'd like to play a more active role in their children's education and promote more self-managed interests and learning. Many feel that formal schooling begins far too early in the UK. They may have painfully pragmatic reasons because their children have failed to thrive in schools – they may be gifted, have developmental or special needs, have been inadequately supported, be vulnerable, have emotional needs, learn best in different ways, have ongoing illness and so on.

Is Flexischooling common?

Flexischooling has been practiced but not widely known about since the 1980s. More recently, a surge in interest and practice has occurred, particularly where forward thinking head teachers have introduced innovative schemes. Flexischooling appeals to parents wishing to avoid the ever increasing rigidity in the current conventional system and therefore enquiries about it have dramatically increased.

At what age can pupils be flexischooled?

The simple answer is at any age, there are examples of successful flexischooling across the full age-range and in a variety of diverse settings

What about under 5's?

Flexischooling is not to be conflated with part-time schooling prior to compulsory school age. This is a parental right and must be accommodated by schools (see 2.16 of section 2 of The School Admissions Code December 2014)

Will Flexischooling affect my school's Funding?

No. Currently all pupils, including flexischooled pupils, registered at a school receive full funding unless they are dual registered.

Does the National Curriculum apply?

Yes to the school based part but not necessarily the non-school based part. In law, the national curriculum does not apply to the non-school based part of the education of a flexischooled child unless this was part of the arrangement/agreement between the school and the parent.

How does flexischooling work in practice?

Models There are no fixed flexischooling models. Arrangements are designed to best meet the needs of each child and the contexts and resources of schools. The ratio of time and access to specific areas of curriculum is decided by agreement. There are schools currently successfully flexischooling one or two pupils and others where the majority of pupils are flexischooled.

SAT's

SATs are a statutory requirement for schools so the normal rules apply and the child will be expected to sit them all.

Contracts

Roles and responsibilities are set out in an agreed contract between school and families. These will cover things like curriculum, oversight of home-based learning, arrangements for assessment, special needs, welfare and safeguarding, flexibilities regarding special events, review and so on.

Attendance Codes

Where the child is part time educated at school and part time electively home educated (i.e., with neither oversight nor approval from the school) then the registration mark used is “C” - authorised absence - for the non-school sessions. Naturally this affects the attendance figures of the school, which can be problematic, but Ofsted takes the stance that so long as the pupils are educated that is what is important.

It is the position of The Centre for Personalised Education that the code for Approved Education Offsite (most commonly referred to as the B code) can be used for the non-school based part of flexischooling provided the conditions in The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 regulation 6(4)) are met.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 regulation 6(4))

(4) An approved educational activity is either—

(a) an activity which takes place outside the school premises and which is—

(i) approved by a person authorised in that behalf by the proprietor of the school;

(ii) of an educational nature, including work experience under section 560 of the Education Act 1996(1) and a sporting activity; and

(iii) supervised by a person authorised in that behalf by the proprietor or the head teacher of the school; or

(b) attendance at another school at which the pupil is a registered pupil.

How does Ofsted view flexischooling? Despite concerns raised by some schools concerning the absence codes, no school is known to have been criticised for allowing flexischooling. The schools we are aware of that have the majority of the children on roll subject to a flexischooling arrangement have been praised by Ofsted for their provision and meeting of the children’s individual needs. The April 2019 guidance supports this position.

Termination

The arrangement can be ended by either party provided reasonable notice is given. Terminating flexischooling at one setting does not automatically mean the learner will go full-time. Families may choose to opt for full-time schooling, move elsewhere and negotiate flexischooling again or adopt full-time home-based education.

What about Special Needs?

Schools have the same responsibilities as they have for any registered pupil with special needs. Clearly provision will need to reflect the model of flexischooling being operated.

Why should schools consider taking flexischoolers?

Pragmatism

Schools will be entitled to full funding whatever the balance of school / home-based learning; increased rolls / sustainability (flexischooling is a proven replicable opportunity to build capacity and create sustainable local schools and communities). A proportion of flexischoolers will go on to take full-time places.

Philosophical reasons

Teachers want to make a difference, to change lives and develop communities. Meeting the needs of individual learners is at its heart. Flexischooling changes lives and has proven to be effective for a range of children and young people. Flexi-parents are usually passionate and highly committed, willing to work in partnership and support settings.

Pedagogy

Experience shows that home-based learners and flexischoolers can bring new dimensions and qualities to the classroom. Flexischoolers often have greater independence and self-management, high levels of thinking, oracy and questioning skills, creativity and persistence. Those settings with larger numbers of flexischoolers have explored high level pedagogical approaches with project based, enquiry-led, research approaches, online e-learning and blended support and so on. The arrival of flexischoolers has prompted curriculum and learning developments.

Progress and achievement

Flexischooling is win – win for parents, learner and school. Like full-time home-based learners flexischoolers will usually go beyond schooling time frames flexibly utilising evenings, weekends and year-round experiences. Normal spectrum and gifted learners can devote sufficient time to their passions and dispositions. Evidence is strongly pointing that autistic spectrum learners can benefit with the flexischooling balance. Other developmental, maturation, physical, learning and emotional needs appear better suited to flexischooling. Schools often find that flexischoolers lead to overall gains in their performance data.

Perspectives on flexischooling

Pupils

‘Our teachers are creative and they always make lessons fun!’

‘Flexischooling means I can see more of my mum and we can do loads of really interesting things like go to museums!’

‘My teacher really understands us all.’

Parents

The school offers... ‘Flexibility, and appreciation for family life and a respect for learning outside school.’

‘You have given him time, space and support to reach his potential and you have accepted him for who he is...’

‘None of our local schools will give her advanced tuition for maths and science, so full-time school is not a choice. Flexischooling seems like an option for the very bright child like mine.’

‘... she is self-directing... We have evolved into autonomously educating family and we all LOVE it!’

Schools

‘... from my own teaching experience, I can see other benefits of flexischooling. I feel full-time school does not allow enough time for child-led learning, nor creative activities, which I believe are very important to a child’s development’

'... we work closely with parents and view our children's education as a partnership. This is the basis for flexischooling.'

Ofsted

'the school is a leading exponent of the concept of flexischooling.'

'... Good teaching enables pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities to learn successfully.'

'The school enjoys a high reputation among parents who are consulted regularly.'

'Pupils make good progress because of the effective combination of formal, informal and one-to-one teaching.'

'The flexi-school timetable, used to allow individual pupils to be partly home-educated, works very well.'