

Flexischooling in England - Information for parents

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.

Funding

Learners are registered as full-time with the school and as such are fully-funded. Schools have the budgetary resource to ensure flexischooling can work effectively.

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?

There are many reasons why parents choose flexischooling, such as:

- Parents wish to spend more quality time with their children. They want an active role in their children's education.
- Children can follow their own interests, and different learning styles can be respected and accommodated.
- Children can benefit from both approaches to learning; being taught at school and being educated at home.
 - At school children can work and socialise with their own peer group, they have access to specialist educators and resources they might not have at home, they can join in with activities such as school trips and plays.
 - At home children can benefit from individual tuition or small, possibly mixed age, groups, alternatively their learning can be self-directed and they can experience a wider range of activities in different environments, e.g. outdoor activities, museum visits.
- Children who have difficulties attending school full-time, for example because of illness or emotional or behavioural needs, have the opportunity to follow a reduced timetable without being removed from the school environment altogether.

Flexischooling offers educational journeys and experiences more fitting for the 21st Century. There is space to accommodate self-direction and co-creation and an altogether more personalised approach in contrast to the wholly more authoritarian structures and progressions in full-time schooling.

School and Local Authorities

The benefits of flexischooling are not confined to parents and learners. Schools and local authorities can reap huge rewards in terms of working creatively in ways more closely reflecting the needs of pupils, families and communities. Schools and local authorities consistently struggle to meet statutory educational duties, let alone moral and social imperatives to learners and families. The pressures of rigid curricular progressions, timetables and assessments can mean full-time schooling is a miserable experience for some. This is further exacerbated by lack of resources particularly in the current time of austerity. The potentially life-damaging consequences are only too real and costly to society. Flexischooling is a way to respond to these challenges with transformational pragmatism.

Additionally, some schools are threatened with closure because they are undersubscribed. Small schools in rural areas often fit this criteria. Flexischooling has proven to be a practical solution in changing the fortunes of these schools and the communities they serve, by putting them on a sustainable footing. Furthermore, such schools have begun to look more innovatively at what they offer and how they do it. Flexischooling has the potential to benefit children, families, the wider community, individual schools and even the education system as a whole.

Society at large

Our society is quite rightly concerned with issues like education, equalities, safeguarding, democracy and cohesion. Therefore, it is utterly frustrating that the schooling system scores so many 'own goals' for learners with its rigidity and inability to facilitate a personalised education. The unintended consequences for children can include; damage to mental and physical health, poor learning, thwarted aspirations and failure to fulfil potential.

In summary, although many parents may come to flexischooling out of desperation and frustration with the impact of full-time schooling on their children and the family as a whole, others will come out of a conviction that flexible educational journeys and experiences are more desirable in the education of the whole person and are more aligned with the world we live in. All flexischooling parents, however, seek a more effective and efficient educational model. Experience also shows that schools are more prepared to look creatively at their educational offer and this dynamic holds potential for the whole schooling system.

Flexischooling is not, and probably will never be, suitable for all families and all circumstances. However for a significant number it is a game changer. What flexischoolers bring to the development of our learning system are lessons about the paucity of our current system and the ultimate denial of control over the direction of our own lives, creeping authoritarianism and lack of democracy.

Far from being an odd group at the margins, flexischooling families and flexischools are trailblazers. They deserve to be listened to, learned from and worked with.

How does flexischooling work?

The Flexischooling Agreement

When a parent is interested in making a request for a flexischooling arrangement, contact must be made directly with the Head teacher of the school so that the proposal may be considered.

Once the decision to flexischool is made parents and head teacher should meet and discuss how the arrangement will work. Following this discussion, a written and signed agreement is formulated between the school and parent in order to make expectations clear for all concerned. The agreement should include:

- The expected pattern of attendance at school.
- What areas of education each party will provide.
- To what extent the National Curriculum will be followed in the non-school based element of flexischooling.
- How school and parents will co-operate to make flexischooling work, e.g. regular planning meetings between parent and school to ensure the child achieves his or her potential and to promote good home-school relationships.
- How parents will keep records of their child's learning and progress in the off-site element of the agreement, e.g. by keeping a journal including children's writing, parental observations, reports and annotated photographs.
- What arrangements will be made for pupil assessment (see below)
- Which provisions will be made for any perceived special needs.
- What flexibility there will be regarding special events which fall outside the normal attendance pattern.
- How the register will be marked (see section Marking the Attendance Register).
- The length of time the agreement is to run before being reviewed.
- Under what circumstances and with what notice either party can withdraw from the arrangement.

National Curriculum and Assessments/SAT's

The National Curriculum applies to the school based part but not necessarily the non-school based part. 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 agreement between the school and the parent.

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

How is Flexischooling recorded in the register?

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 using 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 Elective Home Education Guidance supports this position.

What parents say:

"I felt that I wasn't ready or able to offer my daughter full-time Home Education. So after researching huge amounts found out about this happy compromise. We have not looked back."

"My son goes to a village school about 16 miles away. The school and the head teacher are very, very supportive and fantastic! Nearly half the school is flexischooled."

"They are competent, independent kids, and for me that is a reward in itself. It allows me to have an interesting job for three days, and for them to do their own thing without me, and then we have a four-day weekend when we share our time together and they can follow their own interests."

"We want our children to play, to experiment, to find their passion, to make friends, to be free, to be wild, and to have time. That is probably the most important thing: To have time. Free time. Time to play."

FAQ

What role do the LA play?

None. But they advise schools (often incorrectly in the case of flexischooling) on the law.

Can I appeal against the head teacher's decision?

There is no appeal against the decision of the Head teacher not to agree to a flexischooling request.

I thought the government had stopped allowing flexi-schooling a few years ago?

There was a month back in 2013 during which the then current Minister attempted to ban flexischooling. This was reversed when it was pointed out that the action was unlawful. Flexischooling is not banned and the rules and regulations which allow it have not changed for a decade if not longer.

What if my child is under 5?

Formal flexischooling does not apply until children reach compulsory school age (CSA – the term after a child turns 5). Up until this point the term used is 'part time'. Information regarding part time schooling for children under 5 can be found in a separate leaflet.