

## Choosing to home educate if your child has SEND

Elective home education is when a parent decides to educate their child at home, instead of sending them to school full time. The word elective means it's something that you've chosen to do.

Elective home education is different to home tuition that might be provided by a local authority, or education provided by a local authority somewhere other than a school.

This guide helps parents of children with SEND explore the decision to home educate, including the main things to consider. There is information about how to go about educating your child at home and what you need to do. If your child has an EHC plan, or if you're thinking about stopping home education there is some specific advice about this too.

The Department for Education has guidance for parents about elective home education.

### What does the law say about elective home education?

In law, parents have a right to educate their child at home. That includes children with special educational needs. The law also says that it's parents who must make sure that, if their child is of **compulsory school age**, they get a **suitable full-time education**.

Compulsory school age is between the age of 5 and 16. Specifically, it's from the start of the school term following your child's fifth birthday, until the last Friday in June in the school year when they reach 16. If your child's 16th birthday is in July or August, compulsory school ends on the June date before their birthday.

There's nothing in law to say what a 'full-time' education is. A child in school should get

between 21 and 25 hours of education a week, depending on how old they are. But home education is very different to school, and there are no rules that say a child should get a certain number of hours of education each week.

Young people between 16 and 18 can be educated at home so that they can take part in further education or training. But there are no specific rules about what education should be provided if a child is over 16.

If you're educating your child at home, you're responsible for:

- making sure they get an education if they're between the age of 5 and 16
- getting them an education that is suitable and full-time

If you decide to educate your child at home, you're responsible for that education, including any extra special educational needs support.

There are no specific legal requirements about the content of home education. That means that education at home doesn't need to include any particular subjects or follow the National Curriculum. You also don't need to enter your child for any exams.

### Why do parents who have a child with SEN home educate?

If your child has special educational needs, then you might make the decision to home educate:

- to give more personalised, flexible and comfortable learning opportunities
- for health reasons, especially because of mental health difficulties
- if your child is unable to go to school, because they're finding it hard to manage there or their needs aren't being met

- to have more freedom of choice with the curriculum
- as a stopgap while you're waiting for a place at a specific school
- when there has been a dispute with a school about your child's education or behaviour, which has ended with 'off-rolling' or exclusion (read more about this below)
- because you don't agree with the school system

### Choosing to home educate, or feeling like there is no choice?

For some parents, educating their children at home is less likely to be an active choice, but more likely to be a response to difficulties being at school. Feeling like there is no choice but to educate your child at home puts many families under pressure and in a difficult position. Sometimes school staff also put pressure on parents to remove a child who doesn't 'fit in'. This is called off-rolling and can amount to the same as informal, illegal exclusion.

If your child is finding school very difficult and they're not managing, or if you think they might be permanently excluded, you shouldn't feel pressured into 'choosing' home education. There are other options. If you want to find out more or discuss your situation, contact us.

## Deciding whether to home educate

### How do I decide whether home education is right for us?

Moving to home education is usually a big decision for any parent or family, and it can affect lots of areas of family life. So, it's important to think it through carefully. If you have a child with SEND, the decision can be more complicated. You will have to make sure they get the SEN support they need too. If their needs are complex or severe, that can be difficult.

Think about how long you want to home educate for. You may think your child would benefit from a few months or a year of home education, but then they would want to go back to school. Or you might decide you want to keep your child out of school completely.

Being clear about your long-term goals will help you plan what you're going to do at home and how you're going to do it. So, for example if your child is 14 and wants to eventually go to university what you'll be doing will be very different from if your child is six and you're focusing on play-based activities.

Take as much time as you can to think carefully about the main issues. It's vital for you to talk to your child about what being at home and away from school might mean for them. Home education affects you and your wider family too, so it's a good idea to get the views of everyone that will be affected. Some people also find it helpful to talk to other parents with a child with SEND who are already home educating.

We talked to parents who home educate a child with SEND and asked them what some of the main things to consider are. This is what they said.

- **Flexibility**

You don't need to follow a fixed timetable, give formal lessons, stick to school hours or holidays or have any set curriculum. That means you can learn in many different ways and do the learning when your child is at their best. You can choose a broader learning experience for your child, including life and social skills, mixing with a wide range of people and age groups and doing less 'desk based' learning.

You will need to make sure your child is getting a broad and balanced education though. That means they will need to learn a range of different things. You'll need to broadly plan their education, check how well they're learning and monitor their progress. You'll also have to find resources and do your own research.

- **Child-led learning**

Home education is individual tailored learning. You can focus on your child's strengths and interests and work at their level. That usually means they will be more engaged, and learning will be more enjoyable.

- **The costs**

The cost of home education can be a lot – financially and in other ways. Most families who home educate don't get any help with the financial costs of educating at home. That means you'll probably be paying for resources, equipment, books, trips and exams. If you decide to use tutors or other educational suppliers or providers, you'll need to pay for those too. Giving your child the SEN support they need can add an extra level of cost too. Home education takes a lot of time and that may affect your work life and some parents are unable to work at all. That can affect your income, but it can also affect your view of yourself and who you are.

- **Reduced stress**

Parents tell us that home education sometimes isn't easy, but that for them, it's often a lot less stressful for their child than being in school. Many parents home educate because their child struggles so much in school and, for whatever reason, school-based education doesn't work for them. When that stress is removed it can have a big effect on a child and also on the whole family. Many parents say their child is happier and makes more progress at home.

- **The impact on your relationship**

Parents who home educate get to know their child or children very well and spend lots of time with them. You're the expert on your child, so you should be able to meet their needs well and you can give lots of support and attention. That can bring you closer together. Home education can also be intense, when you're together every day for much of the time. If your child has challenging behaviour, complex needs or difficulty with focus and concentration that can be hard for both of you.

- **Isolation**

Not every family finds this, but for some parents and children, home education can be lonely. Sometimes children can end up feeling lonely - they may miss their friends and it's easy for them to become isolated. If you're a single parent or you haven't got a good support network, you might find it hard too. Many families use local home education clubs and events to help children socialise and

make friends. There are lots of online home education groups and networks too, though they don't suit everyone. Find what works for you.

- **Not having the right expertise and knowledge**

Some people seem to be natural learners, but not everyone is. If you're not confident about your own skills and understanding, you may find home education hard. If your child has complicated or specific learning difficulties, you might need specialist support to help them learn. Getting advice and help from specialists can be hard when your child isn't in school and you're out of 'the school system'. For some families, paying for private advice may not be an option for this kind of support.

## Your child or young person's views

Being educated at home can be a big step for everyone, not least for your child or young person. It's really important for you to find out how your child feels about the idea of home education and start those conversations early on. Children and young people have a right to express their views and for those to be properly considered, depending on their age and maturity. We have information on our website about how you can gather and support your child to share their views.

If your child or young person has an EHC plan, the local authority also has a duty to talk to them about their wishes and what they want for their education, including whether they want to be home educated or continue with it.

## If I decide to home educate, who do I need to tell?

Legally, at the moment you don't need to register or get the local authority to agree if you want to educate your child at home. The only exception is if your child is currently on roll at a special school. You can find out more about this below. There are plans for a compulsory register of children who are home educated to be developed in the future.

If your child isn't in school, the local authority might ask how you're educating them. So, you might find it

helpful to tell them that you're educating your child at home.

Some parents choose to home educate when their child is young, so they may never be in the school system. But if your child is on roll (registered) at a school and you decide to take them out to home educate, then you should tell the head teacher in writing. This will help to prevent any mix-ups about why your child isn't at school and issues about their attendance.

Only one parent needs to give their go ahead for their child to be taken off a school's roll. This is the parent that a child lives with. If you and your child's other parent can't agree about whether they should be taken off a school roll, the family court will make a legal decision about it.

Schools have a legal responsibility to protect children from harm (safeguard), and they will pass on any concerns they have about a child being at home for their education.

If you're taking your child out of school completely, the head teacher must accept your decision. But if you decide you want to send your child to school some of the time and home educate for the rest, they can refuse. This is called flexi-schooling.

If your child is going to any school because of a school attendance order; this order must be revoked by the local authority before you can have your child's name taken off the admission register.

## What happens then?

An adviser may offer to come and visit, or you may be asked to send in a parent report with your plans. You do not have to agree to a home visit.

At a home visit, the adviser will talk to you about the education you're giving your child. You can show them examples of work, resources, timetables and anything else you think will show what you're doing. It's helpful to keep a record of the work you've done, the visits you go on and the progress your child is making. The aim of the visit is to give you support, especially around your child's special educational needs.

After the visit, you'll be sent a home visit report. This will have information in it about what you discussed, plus any plans for the future or recommendations. If your child has an EHC plan, or is being assessed for one, the report is also added to the EHC hub. This means other professionals and the SEND Statutory team can see it too.

## What is flexi-schooling?

Flexi-schooling is when you and your child's school share their education - your child goes to school for part of the week and is home educated for part of the week. It's arranged formally between a school and parents and can be a long or short-term arrangement. It's usual to have a written agreement that's signed by you, the headteacher and your child, if it's appropriate.

A few schools in Devon are offering this and it can work well to support some children and young people with SEND. As a parent you have a right to ask for the school to consider a flexi-schooling arrangement and they must consider it properly. But flexi-schooling isn't a right. The headteacher is the one who makes these decisions. To make it work, you, your child, the headteacher, class teachers and SENCO will all need to work together.

# Educating your child at home and support for SEND

## What is home education going to be like?

It's different for every family. Overall, most families who home educate a child with SEND find it a positive experience. But there are challenges, so if you find you're struggling, get help and support.

Research shows that most families go through a similar experience once their child starts being educated at home.

- The first two or three weeks is a rest and recovery period. School is often stressful for children and parents, and this time is about lowering stress levels and connecting with each other. Lots of parents spend time doing nice things with their children. This gives time for children to accept the



change and parents to think about the next step and beginning learning.

- This is followed by about 12 to 18 months when parents and children start to explore what is on offer and work out how the learning will happen in the best way. They connect with the home education community online and face to face and get support from other parents. This is an important step in being successful and finding like-minded people to be part of a support network.

## What support can I get if I decide to home educate?

There is information for parents on the Devon County Council children and families website and that's a good place to start. It's not specifically about children with SEND but still has a lot of useful information. It has information about:

- resources that can help support a child with SEND
- useful home school resources, events and support organisations and services
- information about further education, work experience and apprenticeships and taking exams

There's usually no general financial help towards resources, tutors, support and activities. If your child is age 14-16 and having elective home education, there are a few colleges in Devon that offer places part time. You can find out more on the Devon County Council children and families website.

## Are there any groups that can give day to day support?

There are lots of organisations, web sites and groups that can give you support and advice. Some are Devon based and can help you meet up with other home education families and families who have children with SEND. Others are national and offer information and advice. They can be helpful for sharing ideas and resources and for some of the social life that your child could be missing if they're not in school.

## How do I give specific support for my child's special educational needs?

When your child is in school, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) is the SEN expert. They have a good understanding of what kind of support can best help a child and can put that in place. They also work with other professionals who can give more specific advice and strategies. When you are home educating, you're likely to have to do those things yourself.

If your child has been in school, a good place to start would be their school plan. Every child with SEND should have a written school plan of some kind, which sets out their needs and the support they should get. If you haven't got a copy, ask the school to give you one before your child leaves.

Look through the plan and see what support you'll need to give for your child's special educational needs. Some of the support they've had at school can be transferred easily to you at home. That includes things like one-to-one support from a teaching assistant, breaking information down into small chunks and taking regular movement breaks. Some SEND support may be to do with managing the school environment itself. By educating at home, you're unlikely to need to do that same support there.

Once you have worked out what you can put in place at home and what is no longer needed, there may be support that you might need to organise from outside your resources.

There are lots of charities and organisations that support families of children with SEND. Many of them can help with learning ideas that fit your child's specific needs, such as handwriting practice, support for dyslexia and visual cue timetables.

If your child has never been to school, or there isn't a school plan, you may not have this kind of information or knowledge. You may need to have your child assessed to find out what specific needs they have, and what kind of support would best help them. As your child grows and develops further you may also need to have their needs assessed. You can find out more about how to do that in the section below.

## How do I get specialist advice or an assessment?

### Educational psychology assessment

An Educational Psychologist (EP) is a specially trained psychologist. They are an expert in child development and education. They use their expertise to help children and young people with difficulties around:

- thinking, learning and memory
- solving problems
- understanding their behaviour and feelings
- relationships and communication
- study skills

If your child had SEN support in school, and isn't being assessed for an EHC plan, you will have to arrange for this kind of assessment and advice yourself. You will also need to pay to have it done.

If your child is having an EHC needs assessment, the SEND Statutory team may arrange for them to have an educational psychology assessment.

### Health assessments

Parents and carers can fill in a referral form for any service that's provided through Children and Family Health Devon.

Some of the services you can access include:

- Speech and language.
- Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) Assessment.
- Mental Health Services and support.
- Occupational therapy (including sensory assessment).
- Specialist Children's Assessment Centres.

Your GP is often a good place to ask for help for your child. If they can't directly refer you, they may know where you can get help or how to access it. If you're worried about your child, or their behaviour, and think they might need to be assessed, talk to your GP first. They can make a referral if needed.

You can find out more about getting further specialist help and assessment on the DIAS website.

## Do I have to follow a set curriculum?

It's up to you what learning you do with your child, and you don't have to follow a set curriculum. In fact, many parents don't and are totally led by their child's interests and skills. Whatever your child is learning should be suitable for their age and needs.

You can also mix academic type 'lessons' with child-led learning, where your child can explore their own interests. You can go out and visit leisure centres, take part in classes, go on trips to museums, gardens and zoos and use your local community.

If your child is likely to go back into school at some time, or take exams such as GCSEs, you can help them be well prepared. You should know the curriculum and course content and your young person's learning should be guided by that. There are also companies that offer distance learning packages for children in both primary and secondary school and beyond. Some of these follow GCSE and A level curriculums.



### Exams: Important to know

Your young person can take exams such as GCSEs and A Levels. You'll have to pay the exam fees and contact exam boards and nearby exam centres. You may also need to pay for extra exam support, for example if your child needs someone to write or read for them during the exam. This can sometimes be difficult to arrange, and you will need to pay, so many families spread exams out over a few years. Make sure you know well in advance how this will work and plan.

It's worth remembering that there are different paths your young person can take to reach their end goal. Colleges and universities are being encouraged to accept other forms of evidence of a student's skills and knowledge, apart from formal qualifications. This could include things such as a portfolio of work.

## Do I have to do all the education myself at home?

You can support and educate your child, and you can use private tutors or others to help you. Some parents use distance learning courses if their young person is studying for GCSEs or A levels. There are other ways of accessing education too, such as parent support groups which offer tuition, and companies which give part-time tuition.

As a parent, you take on the responsibility for making sure that anyone involved in your child's education is safe to work with children. That includes anyone that teaches them at home or anywhere other than a state-funded school. You should make sure that they have been checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).



### Top tips

We asked parents who are home educating children with SEND for their top tips. These are some of the main ones.

- Start with your child's interests and build confidence by focusing the learning on those. As confidence grows, you can move onto other things, and you should also see confidence grow in all aspects of their life.
- Don't over plan. Allow your child to find the topic and then work from there. For example, start with a favourite book and explore the things in and around it.
- Find some home education friends. People who see home educating in the same way as you do, who are likeminded. You can share ideas, challenges and resources with them.
- Check facts yourself and do your own research - explore what's on offer. There are lots of different routes to get where you want to be. There is also lots of misinformation.
- Don't try and do things too quickly. Lots of parents spend money early on, getting things their children won't need or can't get on with. Take it slowly and relax before you make any decisions.

## Educating your child at home and Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans

### If your child already has an EHC plan

You can home educate your child if they have an EHC plan. By choosing that, the legal responsibility to make sure your child gets the educational support that's set out in their plan will become yours. So, once you home educate, the local authority **no longer has** a legal duty to provide any of the special educational support that's in your child's EHC plan. If there is social care and health support included in the EHC plan, these should continue to be given and funded, as long as they're still appropriate. That includes any personal budget for these areas.

If your child has an EHC plan and the support they're getting at school isn't working, before you decide to home educate, talk to the school and your child's SEND Statutory team caseworker. The children who have an EHC plan are those who need more complex and specialised support, and that may be hard for you to provide at home. Talk about whether the plan needs to change to include any new needs (section B), to set out different support (section F) or to change the place where your child goes to school (section I).



### Important to know

If you home educate, the local authority must still look at and review your child's EHC plan every year. They should check to make sure that you're giving the right support and your child's needs are being met.

If you aren't contacted by the SEND Statutory team around eight weeks before the EHC plan is due to be reviewed, get in touch with your caseworker. You can find their contact email in the left-hand column of your child's EHC Hub pages. Or email the central email. If you include an EHC Hub reference number in the subject line, your message should automatically be redirected to the right person.

## If your child has an EHC plan which names a school, and you now want to home educate

If your child is at a mainstream school, you must tell the school in writing that your child will be getting their education somewhere else. The school must take your child's name off their admission roll.

If your child is at a special school, it's a different process. The professionals involved with your child and the case worker from the SEND Statutory team will hold a review of the EHC plan with you. You may be asked to write a detailed report covering all aspects of the different parts of the EHC plan, saying how you would give the support set out in it. This will be discussed as part of the review and a decision made about whether it's appropriate for your child to come off a school roll and be home educated.

If the local authority decides that the education you're giving is suitable, Section I of the EHC plan should be changed. The local authority should name the type of school that would be suitable but say that parents have made their own arrangements (under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996).

Some EHC plans include funding in the form of a personal budget. This is quite a complicated area, so if your child already has an EHC plan and you want to find out more, contact us for advice.

### If you want to apply for an EHC needs assessment

If you're home educating your child and you think they might need more support, or you think that their needs aren't clear, you can ask the local authority for an EHC needs assessment. You can do that by filling out an online form through Devon's EHC Hub or by writing to the SEND Statutory team at Devon County Council and asking for one. Details are at the end of this guide.

When you ask for an assessment, you'll need to show clearly why you think your child needs one. So, you'll need good evidence that they may have unmet, or unclear, special educational needs.

## Deciding to stop elective home education

Whatever the circumstances, at some point you may want your child to start or go back to school, or they might decide that's what they want.

Some parents find that after a while, educating their child at home takes its toll on everyone. Some parents find it a 'full on' or intense experience, especially if their child has challenging behaviour. Home educating can affect relationships too if a parent and child don't get a break from each other.

For other parents it's the time it takes up or the costs of home education that become too much. Family circumstances may change and make it difficult to keep going, or sometimes a child's needs change as they get older too. What worked well when they were six may not be working so well when they are 10 or 12.

Once your child is being home educated, it can be difficult to get back into a school environment. If your plan is for them to return to school or go to a new school, it can take time for plans to be made and the right school place to be found. During this time, the difficulties that may have led to your decision to home educate, such as anxiety or school avoidance, can sometimes become worse. That can make it less likely that school will be a success when they eventually go back.

### How do I get my child back into school?

First, talk to your child or young person and find out what they think and feel about going back to school. Some children can find it hard to re-adjust. If your child has never been to school, it could be a challenging and stressful experience.

If they have worries about starting school or going back, you and the school are going to need to know what these are and tackle them. Bear in mind that what they think they need may be different from what you think. You can find out more about how to get your child or young person's views on our website.



## If your child or young person doesn't have an Education Health and Care plan.

**Step one** Be as sure as you can this is the right move. It can be unsettling for all of you to make a big change. If you decided to home educate because of difficulties at school, then ask yourself 'How will things be different going back in?'

**Step two** If your child is going into a state school (not a private school), contact Devon County Council school admissions. Ask which schools have places in your child's year group in your local area.

**Step three** Contact the schools that have places or those that you like (some schools have waiting lists for places) and ask if you can visit. Talk to the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) about whether they can meet your child's needs. If they can, ask what sort of support they will put in place.

**Step four** Once you've chosen a school, work with them to make a clear plan to get your child gradually into school. This is sometimes called a reintegration plan, and it should give your child the best chance of getting back into school successfully. The plan should focus on the needs of your child or young person and what's going to work best for them. So, you may decide that they'll visit the school a few times, gradually spending more time there as they get to know staff and children. Or you could ask for a temporary part-time timetable until your child has settled in. Take things at a pace your child can manage and make sure their support is well planned and ready before they go back to school.

**Step five** Have regular meetings with school to check how things are going and change the support if it's needed. If you think your child needs extra support, over and above what the school is doing, then you can ask them whether an assessment for an EHC plan should be the next step. This is an assessment of your child's needs, to see whether they need an EHC plan.

## If your child has an Education Health and Care plan.

**Step one** Be as sure as you can this is the right move. It can be unsettling for all of you to make such a big change. If you decided to home educate because of

problems at school, then ask yourself 'How will things be different going back in?' If your child has been at a special school, then you're probably not going to get much choice, and they may end up going back to the school they were at.

**Step two** Call your caseworker at the SEND Statutory team at Devon County Council and talk about how things are and what you would like to happen. Your child's EHC plan will need to be reviewed and changed. A school place or other education for your child will need to be found and that can take time. You can find out more about what's available in our information about choosing a school.

**Step three** When there is a place for your child, work with the school to develop a clear reintegration plan. This is a plan to give your child the best chance of getting back into school successfully. The plan should focus on the needs of your child or young person and what's going to work best for them. So, you may decide that your child will visit the school a few times, gradually spending more time there as they get to know staff and children. Or you could ask for a temporary part-time timetable until your child has settled in. Take things at a pace your child can manage and make sure support is well planned and ready before they go back to school.

**Step four** Have regular meetings with the school to check how things are going, and to change the support if it's needed. You'll also have a review of your child's EHC plan every year.

## Need more information?



DIAS information that may be helpful.

These resources are on our website or available as a document by contacting us.

- EHC needs assessment: A booklet for parents and carers plus a factsheet
- EHC plans factsheet and web page
- Parent carer, child and young person views webpages

**Department for Education**

Elective home education guidance for local authorities and parents

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education)

**Devon County Council****Elective home education information on the children and families website**

[www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/elective-home-education/](http://www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/elective-home-education/)

**Part time college places for 14-16 year olds**

[www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/elective-home-education/alternative-provision-14-16/](http://www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/elective-home-education/alternative-provision-14-16/)

**Information about moving back to school**

[www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/elective-home-education/making-the-transition-to-school-or-college/](http://www.devon.gov.uk/children-families-education/education/elective-home-education/making-the-transition-to-school-or-college/)

**Children and Family Health Devon**

0330 024 5321

[childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk](http://childrenandfamilyhealthdevon.nhs.uk)

**EHC Hub (for EHC needs assessment requests)**

[ehchub.devon.gov.uk](http://ehchub.devon.gov.uk)

**Devon County Council SEND Statutory team**

01392 383000

[educate.specialeducationcommunications-mailbox@devon.gov.uk](mailto:educate.specialeducationcommunications-mailbox@devon.gov.uk)

**JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications**

Exam information for private candidates

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/private-candidates/>

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