

Elective Home Education (EHE)

Elective Home Education (EHE) is the term used by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to describe parents' decisions to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school. If you are considering educating your child at home as opposed to in a school, the following questions and answers will give you more information and help you in making your decision. They also outline the way in which Nottinghamshire Local Authority (LA) carries out its duties under the 1996 Education Act. The term "parent" is used throughout this information to refer to all those with parental responsibility, including guardians and carers.

1. Do children have to go to school?

The 1996 Education Act states that "it is the duty of parents to secure an appropriate full-time education for their children of compulsory school age". Most parents carry out this duty by ensuring their child attends the school which serves their local community. However, for a wide variety of reasons, some parents decide to take on the duty to educate their children themselves, that is, to educate at home.

2. What is the parents' actual duty?

Under section 7 of the 1996 Act, the parents of every child of compulsory school age:

"shall cause the child to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his/her age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he/she may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise". ("Or otherwise" includes EHE.)

3. What is 'compulsory school age'?

The law requires a child to be educated from the start of the school term following their fifth birthday until the last Friday in June in the school year in which a child reaches sixteen. If, when you decide to home educate, your child is registered at a state school, you should inform the headteacher, in writing, that you are home educating and he/she will inform the local authority and give you a copy of this notification.

4. What is the LA's duty under the 1996 Education Act?

Under the Education Act 1996, local authorities shall intervene if it appears that parents are not providing a suitable education. Case law has described a suitable education as that which "primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the country as a whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so". However, the local authority has no statutory duty to monitor the quality of home education on a routine

basis. Nevertheless, to enable the local authority to ascertain if home education is suitable, we gather evidence.

5. What evidence might the LA request?

Once a parent has decided to home educate and the local authority has been notified, the local authority elective home education administrator will contact the parent to arrange for an elective home education adviser to visit the home of the parent. If the parent is unwilling to meet in their home, a neutral venue will be agreed. Nottinghamshire local authority seeks to work in partnership with parents and would prefer to meet with parent and child. In rare cases, the parent may choose to meet the local authority adviser by themselves or not at all. If parents exercise their right not to meet with a local authority adviser they can then provide evidence through samples of work, diaries, reports from parents or independent tutors or a description of their educational philosophy or in some other appropriate form. Although parents are under no duty to respond to such enquiries, it would be sensible for them to do so.

6. What should my child learn?

When a child is educated at home it is the decision of the parent as to what and how the child learns. The education should be such as to prepare the child for life in modern civilised society and enable them to achieve their full potential. There is no requirement to follow the National Curriculum, which applies only to maintained schools. However, you may wish to be aware of the content of the National Curriculum as it does provide a useful framework, especially if you intend to return your child to state education or to pursue more formal qualifications, such as GCSEs.

The National Curriculum subjects are English, mathematics, science (known as the 'core' subjects), ICT, history, geography, technology, art, music, citizenship, physical education and a modern foreign language. A copy of the National Curriculum is available on the internet at www.nc.uk.net.

7. How should I carry out Home Education?

Education may be provided by a combination of the parents, small groups of home-educating families, or private tutors or by any other means deemed suitable by the parent. Irrespective of how the child's education is arranged it will be up to the parent to demonstrate to the local authority that a suitable education is being provided. Some home educators have a timetable showing the normal planned activities over a period of time such as you would find in a school. Other parents choose to follow a form of 'discovery' education where the interests of the child are followed. Yet others use a mixture of these methods. The local authority's interest is in establishing that a suitable education is taking place, rather than endorsing any particular method.

8. How is the LA involved in education at home?

If required, the local authority elective home education adviser will work in partnership with parents and will offer help and advice to home educating families. However, the local authority is unable to offer direct teaching or to provide materials for children being educated at home. You will also be responsible for any work experience placements, if you wish to organise one. Similarly, you would have to pay for any examination registration fees and assessment of coursework by an accredited person. No visit to discuss and advise on the education you are providing will take place unless an appointment has been made in advance and you are agreeable to the visit. Meeting the elective home education adviser will allow you to discuss the style of education being followed and to talk about the type of evidence that can assist the local authority in coming to a judgement about the suitability of your child's education.

9. What if the LA officer has concerns or reservations about our education at home programme?

After each visit, or on receipt of appropriate evidence, a report will normally be sent to you within ten working days. The report will include a description of the provision along with any recommendations of how to improve the education of your child. If the local authority is not satisfied that a suitable education is taking place, then further visits and/or evidence may be requested with the aim of helping you to overcome the difficulties within a mutually agreed timescale. If, however, the local authority still considers that your child is receiving an unsuitable education then it is our duty to serve a notice. The local authority would prefer to address the situation informally in the first instance. At this stage parents are encouraged to provide information in any of the forms mentioned above. Parents are under no duty to respond to such enquiries, but it would be sensible for them to do so. If the problem has still not been resolved the local authority will issue a school attendance order following the involvement of the Education Welfare Service. This will require you to send your child to a school named on the order (Section 437, Education Act 1996). Please note that at any stage following the issue of a school attendance order you may present evidence to the local authority that you are now providing a suitable education and apply to have the order revoked.

10. What if I decide to educate at home and then change my mind?

Should you wish at any time for your child to enter or re-enter the school system (or are unsure about how to do this) you may either contact your local school, or the local authority elective home education administrator on 01623 434141.

11. Can my child attend school part-time?

In Nottinghamshire, children generally attend school full-time, except if there is a planned programme of re-integration. 'Flexi-schooling' or 'flexible school attendance' is an arrangement between the parent and the school where the child is registered at school and attends the school only part-time; the rest of the time the child is home educated (on authorised absence from school). This can

be a long-term arrangement or a short-term measure for a particular reason. 'Flexi-schooling' is a legal option provided that the headteacher at the school concerned agrees to the arrangement. The child will be required to follow the National Curriculum whilst at school but not whilst they are being educated at home.

12. What will happen if we decide to move?

Please notify the local authority elective home education administrator on 01623 434141.

13. What should I do if my child has Special Educational Needs?

If you are concerned that your child has Special Educational Needs (which are described in the Education Act 1993 as "learning difficulties that may require special educational provision") then please notify Carol Parkin on 01623 434141. Please note that if your child attends a special school the consent of the LA should be sought before removing your child from school to home educate.

14. Further considerations

Deciding to educate your child at home is a major step that involves commitment and a tremendous investment of time and energy. There are a wide variety of reasons for parents choosing to home educate, but if it is due to an unresolved dispute with a school, the local authority strongly suggests a dialogue first with the school to attempt to resolve any dispute. It is also well worth talking to someone who has experience of the highs and lows of home education before finally making the decision. There are several support agencies in England to help home educators. An internet search using 'home education' lists many of these organisations. Some of these groups also have local support networks. Two of the best known groups are the Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS) and Education Otherwise.

If your child is aged 13 or over, you may wish to contact Connexions, who provide support with Information, Advice and Guidance on education and careers. They can be contacted via www.connexions-direct.com .

For further information about elective home education contact carol.parkin@nottsc.gov.uk who is the elective home education administrator, or telephone 01623 434141.