



'How to' Guide

Educating your child or young person at home

This guide is about educating your child or young person at home. It tells you your rights and responsibilities and what help is available. It also includes information about getting the most out of home education, and about going back to school after a period of home education.

DIAS is a free, confidential and impartial service providing information and support to parents, carers and young people about special educational needs and disability. We can support parents, carers and young people with any aspect of SEND education and support.

The important things to know

- Most children have their education at school, but some parents choose to educate their children at home. This is called Elective Home Education (EHE). Parents have a legal duty to make sure that if their child is of compulsory school age, they get a suitable full-time education.
- Making the decision to home educate can be a big one for any family and it can affect lots of areas of family life. It's important to think it through and explore all your choices. As well as the benefits of home education, there are some downsides too.
- Legally, you don't need to register or get approval from the local authority to educate your child at home, except if your child is at a special school.
- Once you decide to home educate, it's helpful to tell Devon's EHE service. They can give you information, advice and support.
- There are lots of organisations, websites and groups that can support you. But, there is no general financial help for resources, tuition, support and activities.
- If your child has an EHC plan, you can home educate. You must tell the school and the local authority and they must review the EHC plan every year to make sure your child's needs are being met.
- If you've been home educating and it's no longer working, then you can arrange for your child to go back into school. It can sometimes be difficult for children to re-adjust, so it's important to talk about it with your child and plan well.
- If your child isn't managing at school, or if you think they might be at risk of being permanently excluded, you shouldn't feel pressurised into 'choosing' home education. If you want to find out more about your options get advice from DIAS or Devon's EHE Service.

What is Elective Home Education (EHE)?

Elective home education is what the Department for Education calls a parent's decision to teach their children at home instead of sending them to school. This is different to home tuition that might be given by a local authority, or education provided by a local authority somewhere other than a school.

There are lots of reasons why parents choose home education, such as:

- religious or cultural beliefs
- if their child is being bullied
- not liking, or being unhappy with, the school system
- a short term plan, because their child is unable or unwilling to go to school
- to have a closer relationship with their children
- if their child has special educational needs and is struggling with school, or a parent feels their needs aren't being met
- the school that they want for their child doesn't have places

Parents have to make sure that, if their child is **of compulsory school age**, they get an appropriate **full-time education**. This is the law.

Compulsory school age is when a child's education must start and finish. In the UK it's from the start of the school term following their 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 age ends on the June date before their birthday.

"The responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. In England, education is compulsory, but school is not."

Department for Education guidance

There's nothing written down in law to say what a **'full-time' education** is for state maintained schools. 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 going to school, and there are no rules that say a child should get a certain number of hours each week.

Young people between 16 and 18 have to take part in education or training. They can have that education at home instead of at college.

What you have to do for your child's education (your responsibilities)

If you decide to teach your child at home, you'll be responsible for their education. The local authority may make an 'informal enquiry' from time to time to check that what you're teaching them is suitable and good enough. If they think that it isn't, you could end up being given a school attendance order. This means you won't be able to home educate, but instead you will have to register your child at a school that the local authority names. If you don't follow what's set out in a school attendance order you can be taken to court.

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

Moving to home education is 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 and look at all your choices.

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

Take as much time as you can to think carefully about the main issues, including the possible pros and cons. It's a good idea to talk to your child and other family members or friends about what being at home might mean. Some people also find it helpful to talk to other parents who are already home educating.

Here are some of the main pros and cons.

- **Teaching your child at home gives you lots of control over what they learn.** You don't need to have any teaching qualification, follow a fixed timetable, give formal lessons, stick to school hours or have any set curriculum. But, you will need to make sure your child is getting a broad and balanced education. That means you'll need to teach them about a wide range of different things. You'll need to plan what to teach, check how well they're learning and monitor their progress. You'll also have to find resources and research topic areas.
- **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. You'll also be spending a lot of time every day with your child. That can bring you closer together but it can also be hard, especially if their behaviour is challenging or they find it hard to focus.
- **Most parents aren't qualified teachers, so you'll be learning new skills.** You'll need a good level of knowledge, especially as your child gets older when they may be learning at a higher level.
- **You're unlikely to get any help with the costs of teaching your child at home.** That means you'll be paying for resources, equipment, books, trips and exams. Home education takes a lot of time and that will probably affect your work life – in fact, you may not be able to work at all.
- **School life for a child is about more than education.** At school your child is mixing with others, building relationships, belonging to a community and learning social skills. Being in school can help some children become more confident and more able to face life's challenges. These are important life skills, so you'll need to think about how you're going to help your child develop these.
- **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 if you're on a budget, going private may not be an option.

Home education may not be the only choice

If school is hard for your child and they're not managing, or if you think they might be at risk of being permanently excluded, you shouldn't feel pressured into 'choosing' home education. If you want to find out more about your options, you can talk to Devon's Elective Home Education team or your child's SENCO, if they're in school. Or, you can contact us to speak to a DIAS Officer about alternatives.

Who do I need to tell if I decide to home educate my child?

Legally, you don't need to register or get the local authority to agree if you want to teach your child at home, except if your child is at a special school. But if your child isn't in school, the local authority might ask how you're educating them. Many parents find it helpful to tell the local authority home education service that they're home educating (there's information about this at the end of this guide).

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.

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.

The head teacher will tell the Elective Home Education (EHE) service what you've decided. If you're taking your child out of school completely, the head teacher must accept your decision. But they can refuse if you want to send your child to school some of the time and home educate for the rest. This is called flexi-schooling and it's unusual for schools to agree to it.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan you should tell the local authority you'll be educating your child at home.

- If your child is at a **mainstream school**, their plan will need to be changed. The placement (school) named on the plan will have to be changed and the support your child gets will probably need to be looked at.
- If your child is at a **special school** their EHC plan will need to be changed. You will also need to get permission from the local authority to take your child's name off the school's roll. This shouldn't take long or be complicated. The local authority can say no if you ask to home educate. If this happens, you can appeal their decision not to change the EHC plan. Contact DIAS if you need more information and advice about this.

What happens then?

Once the EHE service knows you're home educating your child, they will send you information and an adviser will offer to come and visit you and your child at home. You don't have to have a home visit - you could meet somewhere else or give examples of what you're doing with your child another way.

At a home visit, the EHE 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.

If the EHE Service decides that the education you're giving is suitable, they will give you a 'letter of satisfaction'. Someone from the EHE Service will contact you on the dates you've agreed, to check that everything is still working well.

Educating your child at home

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

There is information for parents on the EHE web site – the 'Information for Elective Home Educators' booklet is a good place to start and it has information about:

- the law and your responsibilities as a parent/carer
- Devon library resources
- useful web sites and teaching resources
- exam boards
- information about how to keep your child safe on the Internet
- a list of schools and centres that will let external students sit exams

There's no general financial help towards resources, tutors, support and activities. If your child is age 14-16 and having elective home education, they can go to a Further Education College part-time. If they do this, the college can get some funding for them directly from the Education Funding Agency. Ask the EHE service for more information.

How do I get specialist advice or an assessment?

If your child has an EHC plan, or is being assessed for one, you can ask for an educational psychology assessment. You can also ask for other specialist assessments or advice, for example about communication or hearing problems. You can do this as part of the assessment process or an review of an EHC plan.

If your child doesn't have an EHC plan, you'll have to arrange for this kind of assessment and advice yourself. You'll also need to pay to have it done. The only exception is if your child is going back into school. Then the EHE Service can pay for an educational psychology assessment, which may help your child to settle back into school.

Parents and carers can ask for a referral to any service provided through **Integrated Children's Services Single Point of Access** (called the SPA). There is a self-referral guide on their website for each service, or you can call them and ask for information and advice. Details are at the end of this guide. The services you can access there include:

- Speech and language
- Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) Assessment
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Social services for children with additional needs
- Occupational therapy (including sensory assessment)
- Specialist Children's Assessment Centres.

Do I have to follow a set curriculum?

It's up to you what you teach your child and you don't have to follow a set curriculum, though the education you give should be suitable for your child's age and needs. 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 should be learning that.

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

There are organisations, web sites and groups that can give you support and advice. This 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. The 'Information for Elective Home Educators' booklet on the EHE web site lists many of these (details are at the end of this factsheet).

Do I have to do all of the teaching myself at home?

You can teach your child or 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.

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

Because you don't need to follow the hours of the usual school day, you can be flexible and plan learning around your child. So you could arrange the more difficult learning for the times when they're likely to be most focused, or work around hospital or therapy appointment.

Can someone who is home educated take formal exams?

Yes. 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. Make sure you know well in advance how this will work for your child.

Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and home education

Can I home educate if my child has an EHC plan?

If your child has an EHC plan, you can home educate them. The local authority must look at the EHC plan every year to make sure that you're giving the right education and support, and that your child's needs are being met.

This is what law and the Code of Practice for SEND says about home education and EHC plans:

If you're having an EHC needs assessment and you want to home educate:

- Where you and the local authority agree that home education is right for your child, the EHC plan should make it clear that they will be educated at home. If this is clear in the plan, then working with you, the local authority must arrange the support that's set out in it.

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

- If you decide to home educate, 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 the school is a special school, the local authority must agree that your child's name can be taken off the roll.
- If the local authority decides that the education you're giving is suitable, it should change the EHC plan to 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).
- The local authority doesn't have to provide what's in the EHC plan as long as they're sure what you're providing is suitable.
- If the local authority thinks that your child isn't getting the right support, and their needs aren't being met through home education, they should give you support to improve things. If that doesn't work, as a last resort, they can issue a school attendance order. This means a child will have to be registered at, and go to, a named school.

Applying 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 plan needs assessment. You do that by filling out a form and sending it to the Special Education 0-25 team at Devon County Council. You can do that through the SEND Local Offer website, or by calling the Special Education 0-25 team. Contact details are at the end of this guide.

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

Deciding to stop elective home education

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.

How do I get my child back into school?

First of all, 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 they have worries about going back, you and the school are going to need to know what these are and tackle them. Bear in mind that what you think may not be the same as what your child thinks – and 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, this is what to do:

1. 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?'
2. 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 (details are at the end of this guide).
3. 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 Need 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.
4. Once you've chosen a school, work with them to make 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 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.
5. 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**

1. 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.

2. Call the Special Education 0-25 team at Devon County Council and talk about how things are and what you would like to happen. Your child's EHC plan is likely to need looking at and changing, so you'll probably need to meet with someone from the 0-25 team. They will need to find a school place for your child and that can take time.
3. 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 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.
4. 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.

Other helpful websites and resources

Devon Elective Home Education Service

T: 01392 287230

W: www.babcock-education.co.uk

The National Curriculum for England

www.gov.uk/national-curriculum

Integrated Children's Services Single Point of Access

T: 0330 024 5321

E: VCL.DevonSPA@nhs.net

W: <http://devon.integratedchildrenservices.co.uk/>

Devon school admissions

T: 0345 155 1019

W: new.devon.gov.uk

Council for Disabled Children School admissions briefing

councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

Devon County Council SEN 0-25 team

Room L102, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter
EX2 4QD

E: specialeducation0-25-mailbox@devon.gov.uk

T: 01392 383000 and say "nought to twenty-five team"

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