

## A GUIDE TO ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The education of a child at home is a great responsibility for a family. It demands a serious commitment of time, money, patience and energy. If you are considering educating your child at home as opposed to in a school, the following questions and answers will hopefully clarify the situation and help you in making your decision. They also outline the way in which Worcestershire Local Authority (LA) carries out its obligations under the 1996 Education Act.

### **Does my child 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 school. However, for a variety of reasons, a small minority of parents decide to take on the duty to educate their child/children themselves, that is to 'educate at home'.

### **What are the parents'/carers' responsibilities?**

Under section 7 of the 1996 Act, 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'*.

### **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.

### **Who do I inform if I decide to educate my child at home?**

If your child is registered at a school you must inform the Head Teacher, in writing, about your intention to educate at home.

If your child is not currently registered at a school you should inform the Local Authority (However, there is no duty requiring you to do so).

### **What is the LA's duty under the 1996 Education Act?**

The Act places the obligation on LAs to intervene if it appears that a child is not receiving an efficient education, which takes into account age, ability, aptitude and any special needs that the child may have. Worcestershire normally undertakes this task by offering visits at times that are mutually agreed. These visits will usually take place during term time and during the working day.

### **How can I teach my child if I am not a trained teacher?**

You do not need to have formal qualifications, or be a teacher, to educate your child at home. Qualities such as patience, enthusiasm and flexibility are invaluable. You do not need to 'know everything'. An important skill, as well as developing a sound knowledge base, is for all concerned to learn how to learn and think, and how to find out information.

### **What will I be expected to teach and how should I teach it?**

Some parents may decide to teach their child themselves, or to make arrangements to plan and teach in small groups with other families who are involved in Elective Home Education.

Alternatively, the family may elect to pay for a private tutor. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that any tutors/teachers are suitably qualified and experienced to teach your child.

Irrespective of who actually teaches the child, it will be up to the parent to ensure that the educational provision is helping him/her to develop and that the child is progressing according to her/his age, ability, aptitude and any special needs.

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. Others use a mixture of these methods. The LA's interest is in establishing that a suitable education is taking place, rather than endorsing any particular method.

### **Do I have to follow the National Curriculum?**

No. The National Curriculum applies only to maintained schools. When a child is electively home educated it is the decision of the parent as to what to teach and how the child learns. However, you may wish to be aware of the content of the National Curriculum as it does provide a 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, Maths, Science (known as the core subjects), History, Geography, Technology, Art, Music, Physical Education, a modern language (from 11 years of age) and Religious Education (unless parents/carers exercise their right to withdraw a child). A copy of the National Curriculum is available on the Internet or from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Many of the commercially produced textbooks and workbooks available from bookshops and libraries now relate their content to it.

### **How do I know that my child is keeping up with his peers?**

Look at National Curriculum Guidelines to give you some idea of what your child is expected to be able to do at different key stages.

### **Do I have to fit in with school terms and times?**

Elective Home Education can be more flexible and less rigid than at school. It depends on how you decide to organise your child's education. The Home Education Liaison Officer will discuss this with you.

### **How is the LA involved in elective home education?**

If required, the LA, through the Home Education Liaison Officer, is happy to give help and advice. However, the LA is unable to offer direct teaching or to provide materials for children being home educated. You will also be responsible for organising, and insuring for, any work experience placements, should you wish this. Similarly, you would have to pay for any examination registration fee and assessment of coursework by an accredited person. At the time of writing, the registration fee for a GCSE exam is approximately £30.

No visit to discuss and advise on the education you are providing will take place unless parents agree an appointment has been made in advance. However, the Educational Welfare Officer for your area may visit without an appointment when you first start educating, or if there is a cause for concern.

### **What if the Home Education Liaison Officer has concerns or reservations about our Elective Home Education programme?**

After the initial visit and any subsequent visits a short report will be sent to you. If the Home Education Liaison Officer is not satisfied that a suitable education is taking place then further visits and/or consultations may be offered with the aim of helping you overcome the difficulties within a mutually agreed time scale. If, in the end, the LA still considers your child is receiving less than satisfactory education then a referral to the Children Missing Education Officer will be made. This may result in an application for a School Attendance Order (Section 437, Education Act 1996) which may require the child to attend a named school. Please note that at any stage following the issue of an attendance order process you may present evidence to the LA that you are now providing a suitable education and apply to have the order revoked.

### **Can my child attend school part-time?**

In Worcestershire children generally attend school full-time, except if there is a planned programme of re-integration. If you choose to educate your child(ren) at home their names will be removed from the school register. However, a parent may request that a Head Teacher admit his/her child part-time (flexi-schooling). This arrangement would be at the discretion of the Head Teacher and Governors of the school. The child will be required to follow the National Curriculum whilst at school but not whilst he or she is being home educated.

### **What if I decide to educate at home and then change my mind?**

Your child can return to school at any time, however, it is important to remember that once your child's name has been removed from the school's register the school are **not** obliged to keep this place open for your child therefore this may result in your child attending a different school.

**What will happen if we decide to move?**

You should inform the Home Education Liaison Officer of your new address. If you are moving out of the county and still intend to educate your child at home the Home Education Liaison Officer will inform the Education Department in your new county.

**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 of 1993 as 'learning difficulties that may require special educational provision') then please contact the Parent Partnership Service. They will provide details of supporting agencies. Please note that if your child attends a Special School the consent of the LA **must** be sought before removing your child from school to home educate.

**Will my child miss the social aspect of school?**

You will need to consider the social development of your child, which would be enhanced through sharing activities with other children. Joining a variety of clubs and special interest societies etc. can prove very enriching, as can mixing and sharing skills with other people of all ages.

**Who can help?**

There are a number of independent support agencies whose addresses are given in the Elective Home Education Contact/Support Organisations booklet, available from the Parent Partnership Service/Home Education Liaison Officer.

**What else should I consider before taking the step to home educate?**

Deciding to educate your child at home is a major step that, as you know, not only involves commitment but also a tremendous investment in time and energy. It is well worth talking to someone who has experience of the highs and lows of home education before finally making a decision.

If the decision to home educate has arisen because of a disagreement with a teacher or school, and the issue has not been resolved following discussion with the Head Teacher or Governors, then the Parent Partnership Service may be able to help. Home education is not always a way of solving your child's non-attendance at school. If you and your child are committed and enthusiastic about it then Elective Home Education can be a happy and constructive experience for both of you.

**Things you can do to help your child learn:**

1. Give your child confidence through lots of praise and encouragement
  - as a parent/carer, you have tremendous power to strengthen your child's confidence, and confidence is vital to learning
  - specific praise focusing on a particular aspect of their work ("I like the way you have.....") is more effective than bland, blanket praise.
  - some argue that to really do well, children, perhaps all of us, need ten times as much praise as criticism!
2. Read to, and with, your child as much as possible.  
Even young children can be helped to read notices and signs and understand what they mean.
3. The Government encourages parents/carers to read to children, hear them read, or encourage them to read to themselves, for at least 20 minutes a day.
4. Encourage children to observe and talk about their surroundings.
5. Make use of your local library.
6. Look out for special events and services for children.

7. Visit museums and places you think your child might find interesting.  
(Children have free admission to many major national museums and art galleries - see accompanying Contact leaflet.)
8. If your child(ren) like watching television, watch it with them sometimes and encourage them to talk about what they have seen. They will get more out of the experience.
9. Try to set time aside to do "homework" activities with young children.
10. Wherever possible, try to provide a reasonably quiet place for children to work (or help them to get to other places where work can be done)
11. Encourage your child to discuss their work with you, including feedback from you/tutor.  
Practice helping without taking over!
12. Try to help your child to see the enjoyable aspects of doing their work!  
*(Reproduced from the DCSF Parents website)*

### **Checklist - what should I need to consider before making a decision?**

- your child is positive about the suggestion
- you are convinced it is the best course of action for your child
- you have the time to devote to your child's education on a regular basis.
- you are able to provide you child with a suitable education
- you are prepared to buy the necessary resources or have access to them
- you have some support available
- you have the space available for a quiet working area
- there are opportunities for physical exercise
- social experiences with other children are available.

### **Useful contacts**

ACE (Advisory Centre for Education)

Tel: 0808 800 5793

Website: [www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk)

DCSF(Department for Children, Families and Schools)

Tel: 0845 602 2260

Website: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/parents](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/parents)

Education Otherwise Association Ltd

Tel: 0845 4786 345

Website: [www.education-otherwise.org](http://www.education-otherwise.org)

Home Education Advisory Service

Website: [www.heas.org.uk](http://www.heas.org.uk)

Home Educating in Worcestershire

[www.worcestershire-home-educators.co.uk](http://www.worcestershire-home-educators.co.uk)

National Curriculum

Website: [www.curriculum.qca.org.uk](http://www.curriculum.qca.org.uk)