

Flexi Schooling Guidance for Schools

Introduction

This document sets out the statutory position and expectations in relation to Flexi Schooling and provides guidance to schools who may need to respond to requests from parents that are considering flexi-schooling as an option for their child. This document clarifies what is meant by the term flexi-schooling and aims to support conversations between parents and schools about this approach to education. The document also explains what schools must adhere to when a flexi schooling arrangement is to be agreed.

What is Flexi Schooling?

The responsibility for a child receiving full-time education while he or she is of statutory school age lies with the parent or guardian/carer. Where a parent/carer educates a child through a pattern of provision partly at school and partly at home or elsewhere as an expression of parental preference, this is called flexi-schooling.

The Department for Education Guidance states: *“Although children being home-educated are not normally registered at any school, parents sometimes choose to make arrangements for a child to receive part of the total provision at a school - the purpose of this will often be to provide education in specific subjects more easily than is possible at home. Such arrangements are sometimes known as ‘flexi-schooling’. Schools are under no obligation to agree to such arrangements, but some are happy to do so. When a child is flexi-schooled, the parents must still ensure that the child receives a suitable full-time education but the element received at school must be taken into account in considering whether that duty is met.”*

Flexi-schooling arrangements are **not** the same as elective home education nor the temporary reduced time-table arrangements a school may put in place in exceptional cases to support a child’s reintegration back into school.

When might a Flexi Schooling be Appropriate?

Flexi-schooling arrangements can apply to any pupil and there are no specific criteria. A common example of when parents will request flexi-schooling arrangements is when their child has a particular sporting talent and flexi-schooling would enable them to benefit from elite coaching during what, for many pupils, would be school time. However, requests for flexi schooling are not solely limited to gifted and talented children and every request should be judged on its merits.

Key Points to Consider

Schools are not obliged to accept flexi-school arrangements if requested by a parent, however, all requests must be considered by the Headteacher on their own merits. When considering requests for flexi-schooling arrangements, headteachers should take into account the best interests of the child. Slough Borough Council advises head teachers to

consider the following when making their decision as to whether flexi-schooling arrangements should be agreed:

- Safeguarding and welfare of the child are of paramount importance, therefore a thorough risk assessment should be undertaken before any agreement is reached about flexi-schooling arrangements. Where there are concerns that the child may be at risk of harm while not in school, flexi-schooling arrangements should not be agreed.
- Where the child falls within a vulnerable category, consideration should be given to consulting the relevant teams and services
- The child's current and anticipated levels of educational attainment.
- Arrangements for monitoring the child's progress.
- How the home and school elements of proposed education will interlink to constitute a full-time education.
- The additional demands and workload of teaching and administrative staff.
- The effect on school discipline and the morale and motivation of other pupils.
- A flexi-schooled child remains on the school roll, therefore this could deny a full-time place to another prospective pupil.
- How any possible impacts on attendance recording and overall school attainment/progress figures will be managed

Vulnerable Pupils - Additional Considerations

Slough Borough Council requests that schools give due consideration to pupils who fall within particular vulnerable categories before agreeing to flexi-schooling arrangements, such as Children in Care, children subject to a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Where this applies, the school must consult with Slough Borough Council Children's Social Care, the Virtual School, or SEND Team, as appropriate, before agreeing to any flexi-schooling arrangements. Where a child has an EHCP, flexi-schooling should be considered **only** when the LA SEND/Education Psychology Service has been consulted and is in agreement with the arrangement.

What should all schools do when a Flexi Schooling is Agreed?

In all cases where flexi-schooling is agreed, it is recommended that the school has a written agreement with the parents/carers so that expectations and arrangements are clear for both parties. Such an agreement is likely to include:

- the normal expected pattern of attendance at school;
- the rationale for why the flexi-schooling arrangement is in the best interests of the pupil concerned;
- procedures for flexibility around special events which fall outside the normal arrangement;
- how the register will be marked;
- that the school will follow up any unexpected or unexplained absence in the same way as it does for other children;
- arrangements at times of assessment;
- agreement that if the parent/carer chooses to employ other people to educate their child at home, they will be responsible for making sure that those whom they engage are suitable to have access to children and will be responsible for meeting all costs related to this decision;
- agreement on who will meet the cost of exam entries. These are the responsibility of the parent but the school may choose to support with some or all of the costs;

- details of any special educational needs and associated provision;
- arrangements for regular planning and review meetings between parent/carer and school to ensure the child achieves his/her potential and to promote good home/school relationships;
- clarity about the circumstances under which and with what notice either party can withdraw from the arrangement;
- the arrangements for the resolution of any disputes (usual processes are for disputes to be resolved at the most informal level possible, but ultimately any complaints will need to be considered by the Headteacher first and then the Governing Body as usually set out under the school's complaints procedure).

Registration Coding

If a flexi-schooling arrangement is agreed, the periods when the pupil is not in school should be recorded as **C (authorised absence)**, which counts as an absence for the attendance figures. **No** other code should be used for flexi-schooling arrangements.

Please note: Schools should understand that use of the 'C' code as authorised absence will have a detrimental effect for the purposes of Ofsted inspections. Use of the 'C' code would require schools to provide a clear narrative behind weaker attendance data. Schools who have flexi-schooled pupils should be ready to discuss with **Ofsted** inspectors the arrangements they have in place to deal with the requirements of these pupils. Schools are held to account through inspection for the performance of pupils and that will include any who attend the school as part of a programme of flexi-schooling.

When Home Education is Unsuitable

If it appears to the school that parents are not providing a suitable education during the home element of provision, the school may ask parents to take remedial action. Where parents refuse to do so, or concerns about the suitability of home education continue, the school may withdraw its agreement to the flexi-schooling arrangement. Where this occurs, the child would then be required to attend school on a full-time basis. A School Attendance Order would not need to be initiated in these circumstances as the child would already be on roll at a school. If a child fails to return to full-time attendance, school should mark the absence as unauthorised and refer the case to the Attendance Service, in line with persistent absentee protocols.

Funding

The child will be recorded by the school as attending full-time, with sessions not in school being recorded as per agreement. Therefore, the school will receive full-time funding. Flexi-schooled children are included in count returns as for other children. Schools are not obliged to pass on funding to parents however may contribute to the cost of any education provision taking place within the home.

As of September 2023 (Academic Year 2023/24)

When a flexi schooling arrangement has been agreed for an individual pupil, (including pupils with EHCP), the school should inform the Slough Attendance Service by completing the **Flexi Schooling notification form** and return to attendance@slough.gov.uk Please note, this does not constitute a referral, rather, it is a notification. If you would like any further advice regarding flexi schooling or would like to discuss individual cases, please contact your allocated Attendance Officer.

Following receipt of the notification, the school will be contacted by the local authority around the proposed end date the flexi-schooling arrangement indicated on the notification form to

confirm whether the child has returned to full time education. The school can also provide an update to the Attendance service at any point during the course of the flexi-schooling arrangement to advise on any changes/extension to the arrangement.