Department for Education

Draft guidance for children not in school: an overview guide for parents

Contents

Summary 3
Legislation this publication refers to 3
Who this publication is for 3
Which children does this guidance apply to? 4
Before choosing home education 5
Education 5
Cost and resources 5
Learning Environment 5
Children with SEND and EHC Plans 6
What Is a Suitable Education? 7
How Do I Deregister My Child from School? 8
When Is Consent Required? 8
What Information Must Parents Provide for Children Not in School registers? 9
How Will the Local Authority Monitor Home Education? 9
What Support Is Available? 10
Your Child's Information and Privacy 10
Complaints and Concerns 11
Further Information 12

Summary

This guide provides an overview of the key information parents need to know about their responsibilities, and those of local authorities, if their child of compulsory school age is not in school. This includes children who are home educated. It is intended as a summary only to help parents navigate the full statutory guidance and identify the sections most relevant to them. This guide should be read in alongside the full statutory guidance, which contains the full details which parents may need to be aware of. [link to statutory guidance document]

Throughout this guide, 'parents' should be taken to include all those with parental responsibility, including guardians (and foster carers, although in this case the local authority may be the corporate parent).

Legislation this publication refers to

This guidance refers to the:

- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for:

- Parents whose children are of compulsory school age and receive some or all their education not in school, including children who are home educated and flexi-schooled (but not children who are severely or persistently absent[1]).
- Parents considering withdrawing their child from school to educate them at home.

[1] See Working together to improve school attendance: July 2026

Which children does this guidance apply to?

This guidance applies to children who are:

- home educated
- aged 14-16 and attending a further education college or other 16-19 provider part-time, alongside home education
- not registered at a school and taking part in licensed performances, paid sport or paid modelling activities
- receiving all their education through a full-time online provider
- flexi-schooled (children who are educated at home some of the time, but are also registered at a relevant school [2]and attend that school for part of the time. This is different from being on a part-time timetable.)
- attending alternative provision but not registered at a school.
- receiving Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) and not registered at a school
- in custody and not registered at a school
- a child missing education (CME) – these are children who are not in school and not receiving a suitable education.

[2] If you are unsure what constitutes a 'Relevant school' please see the corresponding section in the full statutory guidance document [insert hyperlink]

Before choosing home education

Home Education is a significant commitment. Parents who choose to educate their child at home take full responsibility for:

- providing an efficient, suitable, full-time education.
- organising learning resources.
- meeting any examination costs (if they want their children to take exams).
- funding educational materials, activities, visits, tutors and qualifications.

Before making a decision, parents should consider the factors below.

Education

Parents should consider:

- how you will provide a suitable education for your child
- what your educational approach will be
- how your child will develop literacy, numeracy and wider life skills
- whether your child needs specialist SEND support
- that your child's school place will be lost when they are removed from the school roll

Cost and resources

Home education can involve costs for:

- books and learning materials
- computers and internet access
- educational visits and activities
- GCSE and other examination fees
- tuition or specialist support

Learning Environment

Consider whether your child will have:

- access to a safe and suitable learning environment
- reliable internet access where needed
- Opportunities to socialise and participate in the wider community

Children with SEND and EHC Plans

Parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will want to consider carefully how their child's needs will be met through home education.

Parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may find it helpful to contact their local Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). SENDIASS provides free, impartial information and advice to help parents understand the education, health and care support available to their child and the options open to them.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan:

- The local authority will continue to maintain the plan unless legal criteria for ending it are met.
- However, if you choose to make your own suitable educational arrangements, the local authority is generally no longer responsible for securing the provision specified in the plan.

If your child attends a special school and this was arranged by the local authority, local authority consent will need to be secured before they can be removed from the school roll.

Early discussions with your local authority are strongly recommended.

What Is a Suitable Education?

By law, parents must ensure that their child's education is:

- **Efficient** - The education should achieve its intended aims and support ongoing progress
- **Full-Time** - Learning time should be sufficient to meet the child's educational needs and circumstances. Education that does not occupy a significant part of a child's life is unlikely to be considered suitable full-time education
- **Suitable** - The education must be appropriate to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have

A suitable education should:

- include literacy and numeracy
- enable a child to participate fully in life in the UK by including sufficient secular education
- not directly conflict with or undermine fundamental British values, which are "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs"
- support social development and participation in the wider community
- take place in an environment that enables learning to take place

There is no requirement to follow the National Curriculum or use formal lessons.

How Do I Deregister My Child from School?

If you wish to home educate:

1. Notify your child's school in writing
2. The school will inform the local authority
3. The local authority will determine whether consent is required before the child can be removed from the school roll

When Is Consent Required?

In most cases, parents do not need permission from the local authority to home educate their child. However local authority consent is required where:

- the local authority is currently making child protection enquiries about the child under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
- the child is on a child protection plan, or has been within the previous five years
- the child attends a special school arranged by the local authority

Where consent is required, parents must provide information demonstrating that:

- suitable home education arrangements will be in place
- these arrangements are in the child's best interests

What Information Must Parents Provide for Children Not in School registers?

Parents of a child who is eligible to be included on the registers must provide the information below, if they know it, within 15 days of their child becoming eligible for registration (for example upon reaching compulsory school age or when they are removed from a school roll to be home educated):

- child's name, date of birth and address(es).
- parent or carer names and addresses.
- information about who provides the child's education.
- information about how much education is provided by parents and/ or by others
- information about any external providers used for more than 6 hours per week

The register helps local authorities understand where and how children are being educated, so they can fulfil their legal duties to safeguard all children in their areas and identify those who are not receiving a suitable education.

Parents are only required to give the information they know and do not need to contact their child’s other parent to gather the required information. However, deliberately withholding or providing false information may lead to the local authority initiating the School Attendance Order process, which may eventually require the child to be registered at a school.

Parents of a child attending Alternative Provision or in an EOTAS arrangement may not be required to provide this information to the registers. As these arrangements are organised by the local authority, the local authority will already have some of the information required for their registers.

How Will the Local Authority Monitor Home Education?

Local authorities are expected to make informal enquiries with home educating families, normally at least once per year.

Parents may provide information about education in a variety of ways, including:

- written reports
- samples of work
- discussions with local authority staff
- photographs or videos

The local authority may also request a home visit. Parents are not required to agree to a visit, but the authority must take refusals into account when assessing whether suitable education appears to be taking place.

What Support Is Available?

Local authorities have a duty to provide information and advice to eligible families whose children are on the Children Not in School register.

Support may include:

- advice about home education
- information about local services
- information about examinations and qualifications
- signposting to sources of assistance

Local authorities must also offer home educating parents opportunities to attend forum meetings at least twice a year.

Your Child's Information and Privacy

Information held on Children Not in School registers is protected by data protection law.

Parents have the right to:

Request access to information held about them or their child through a Subject Access Request (SAR). If releasing information in response to a SAR could place a child or their parent at risk of harm, local authorities may withhold or redact information where permitted by law.

Request corrections where information is inaccurate.

Raise concerns about data handling through the local authority complaints process and, where appropriate, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Complaints and Concerns

If you are unhappy with how your local authority is carrying out its duties, you may wish to:

- Informally raise this directly with the local authority's Elective Home Education lead directly to discuss concerns or make suggestions.
- Provide comments and feedback via bi-annual engagement forums provided by the local authority.

Where these engagement routes have not provided a satisfactory outcome, or where a parent remains unhappy with the local authority's actions, please refer to the full statutory guidance document for details of the routes available to parents and others who wish to raise concerns or make a complaint.

Further Information

Please see the full statutory guidance [Insert Link to Guidance], for detailed information on:

- Deciding whether home education is right for your child
- Withdrawing your child from school and when local authority consent is required
- What counts as a suitable education
- Support and advice available to families whose children are registered on the Children Not in School register
- Children Not in School registers and what information parents must provide
- Home visits
- How local authorities consider whether suitable education is being provided
- School Attendance Orders and what happens if concerns arise
- Safeguarding, privacy and sharing information
- Complaints and appeals
- Special circumstances, including families who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse, child performers and nomadic families

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