**Flexischooling – Information for Parents Negotiating with Schools.**

**Please read this in conjunction with our other information leaflets.**

**Communication.** First communications - It is important to direct your enquiries to the headteacher (avoids your approach getting halted by office gatekeepers) and provide them with the briefing information on the Centre for Personalised Education website (within the Flexischooling section or the Flexischooling Facebook groups).

It’s useful to cover all bases – some people prefer hard copies others work digitally. Do both. It’s important that headteachers have information so that they can prepare for a meeting… they are busy and won’t want to start from scratch. Your covering letter should point to further information that is available on the Centre for Personalised Education website - Flexischooling section and give web address (see below).

**Covering Letters** should be short and to the point. A brief reasoning of why you are seeking flexischooling is fine but save the rest for the meeting.

The headteacher will need the –

[**Is Flexischooling Legal in England (V1 April 17)**](http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/law-and-guidance/is-flexischooling-legal-in-england-v1-april-17/)

<http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/law-and-guidance/is-flexischooling-legal-in-england-v1-april-17/>

[**Head teacher leaflet (V3 May 17)**](http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/school-info/head-teacher-leaflet-v3-may-17/)

<http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/school-info/head-teacher-leaflet-v3-may-17/>

[**Link to all our flexischooling information in the CPE website section**](http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/concept/)<http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/concept/>

**Part-time schooling pre-compulsory school age.**

Flexischooling is not to be conflated with part-time schooling prior to compulsory school age. This is a parental right and must be accommodated by schools [**(see Admissions Code (Dec 2014)**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2) Section 2.16) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>

**The above provide all the relevant links / definitions**

The headteacher is ultimately the person who will agree or otherwise to your request. In most schools, the likelihood is they will probably not have come across flexischooling so they will find the information a good way in. It is probable that the headteacher will also want to take the advice of the local authority as they take due diligence and assure themselves that flexischooling is a possibility. Under ideal circumstances local authorities would have authoritative knowledge about flexischooling but sadly, most haven’t. They can give the inaccurate advice – sometimes because they are confused themselves and sometimes consciously they disapprove. *However, at the end of the day it is not for the local authority to adjudicate it is in law a school decision.*

**Face to Face Meeting.** Personal communication is essential if confidence and trust is to be built. Make an appointment to meet with the headteacher and ensure there is sufficient time to discuss flexischooling. Although you may be the most clued up and perhaps passionate about flexischooling please don’t assume the headteacher will be. The idea may be totally new to them and this will be a personalised arrangement for you and your child(ren). It will incur time to set up and regular review. Bear in mind that even if the headteacher is convinced they will also need to speak to and bring on board the appropriate classteacher(s). If they are not on board any arrangements can easily break down.

Try and understand the head teacher’s concerns as it is then much easier to work with the head to manage them. Parents will often have the similar concerns, which can be useful to point out. This may seem daunting but the briefing information you have already sent them hold the keys to your arguments and by in large most headteachers would be prepared to engage in a dialogue and look into this further. Rehearse the arguments - ***Pragmatism. Philosophical reasons. Pedagogy. Progress and achievement.***

**Classic concerns raised**

* **Progress / falling behind** This rather depends what you are looking for in flexischooling… if it’s the basics maths / literacy where rigid timetabling progressions operate then you may need to think with the school clearly about attendance times and how learning is supported and developed at home etc. On the other hand, if it’s the wider curricular experience and the social experience there may be greater flexibility and less concern.

**Socialisation** A classic concerns that home educators are well used to explaining away in the home-based context. In schools, there is no reason and no evidence that flexischoolers have any more problems than full-time peers. Most socialisation is established in the playground, in clubs and extra-curricular activities. Play dates after school and at the weekends can also strengthen friendships. If your child(ren) is already at the school then friendships will already be established.

* **Opening the floodgates.** Other parents will want to do it – this is a possibility but in practice not a problem. The school can manage this by considering all flexi requests on a case by case basis. Those schools with large numbers or a majority of flexischoolers have actually reaped benefits and developed whole school approaches.

**Benefits to the school.** Be able to rehearse the benefits of flexischooling not only for your child / family but for the school. These are outlined in our briefing documents and on the website. The school will get full time funding, better motivated learners and proactive / committed parents.

**Tour of the School**. (If your child(ren) are not currently attending the school).Either attached to your initial meeting or soon after it would make sense to arrange a tour of the school with your child(ren). It’s important for you to get a feel of the school (rather than just the rhetoric of prospectus and conversation) and it is essential your child(ren) can see for themselves and be drawn into any decision that may be made.

Certain schools may initially be more open to flexischooling. These might be small schools and undersubscribed schools. Where a school is full to the rafters it may well be extremely difficult to accommodate more children even if they are flexischoolers.

**Your child(ren)** Flexischooling is about children and young people and personalising their needs so that they thrive mentally, socially, physically and intellectually. Be able to share what you think your child(ren) will bring to the class/school their qualities and characteristics. Children starting later to school or coming from home education can often be

* More self-reliant, independent, good talkers, questioners, critical thinkers, socially adept across the age ranges etc

At the same time, you may have a child(ren) with special needs.  Schools have the same responsibilities as they have for any registered pupil with special needs. Clearly provision will need to reflect the model of flexischooling being operated. These children will have their own qualities and characteristics and your job will be to convince the school that the flexischooling is the ‘best of both worlds’. Evidence is growing that for some needs like autism it is indeed the best model.

**Curriculum and learning.** Although flexischooling is undoubtedly growing -its early days and flexischooling remains in the shallow end of possibilities and potential. In the present context schools are beholden and driven by the need to meet assessment targets and deliver a proscribed curriculum. This means that school timetables or far more rigid than they may have been in the past. This may mean that practically the school will require a commitment to certain days. Whilst that may not be your ideal you may need to compromise to get things off the ground.

**Contracts.** Clarityis essential and a contract / agreement is a good way of defining this. Roles and responsibilities are set out in an agreed contract between school and families. These will cover things like curriculum, oversight of home-based learning, arrangements for assessment, special needs, welfare and safeguarding, flexibilities regarding special events, review and so on. You will need to talk about the national curriculum, arrangements for SATs, the non-schooled part of the arrangement and procedures for termination. There is [contract guidance](http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/contracts/) <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/contracts/> and a number of sample contract templates within our documentation that could be used or construct your own.

**Review and celebration.** Build in to the contract regular review. This might occur informally in some circumstances on a daily basis, however, formal review opportunities are essential. This may need to be half-termly at least at in the early days, but certainly termly. This enables both parties to give honest appraisal of how things are going and suggest adaptations and a plan to move forward. Reviews also give opportunities to celebrate progress and affirm the arrangement. In some circumstances and with mutual agreement, a home-school notebook or email exchange may be a good form of sharing information. However, be aware that classteachers may not have time to complete regularly.

**Confidence, trust, commitment.** We can’t overstate the importance of a strong personal relationship with the school that provides the classteacher and headteacher with an underpinning of trust. Although schools will be more than adequately financially repaid for taking on flexischoolers in the context of current schooling and the pressures on teachers there will be additional adjustments. In one sense, a school could just say *‘why should we put ourselves out when we already have so much on our plate.’* If you appreciate this and show your understanding of the school’s position things will go better.

If your children are home educated you may well need to do some groundwork in breaking the usual embedded home educated stereotypes. The likelihood is you are well used to these arguments anyway! This is important learning for school staff and a worthwhile engagement in itself.

Even if you’ve convinced the headteacher to go ahead with a flexischooling trial it’s in your interests to invest time in building the core relationship with your child’s(ren’s) classteacher. If the rapport here is good then it is likely that other staff and the headteacher will be receiving good reports and more likely to be happy with flexischooling continuing in future years.

**Attendance Codes.** This thorny question is often the deal breaker. It shouldn’t be but we agree it’s a messy grey area (and the DfE knows this… it’s just not high enough up the agendas to tackle as yet). We’ve outlined the legal situation in our other briefing documents and although some local authorities may try to dissuade schools the fact remain this is achievable and many, many schools make rational and perfectly supportable decisions as to which code they will use. Code B can be used and arrangements made to cover its requirements. Code C can be used and statements like ‘our attendance figures will be hit’ are a red herring. Even if the data is impacted - headteachers will do what they do with any data inconsistencies – they will *explain that they have flexischoolers and that is the nature of the beast.* None of the flexischools we are aware of have ever had Ofsted challenge their attendance data.

**Realism.** You must retain realistic expectations and not assume that you can dominate communication with classteacher and headteacher. This is particularly true in the current contexts of mainstream schools. Teachers are relentlessly busy within the school day and before and after the school day they have to share their time across all children and families. They may resent unreasonable expectations from flexischoolers.

**Finally.** Flexischooling can be win: win for all parties and has the potential in less constrained times to be transformational in the way schools work.

Centre for Personalised Education. 12th July 2017