

Supporting Electively Home Educating Families

Comprehensive Local Authority Training Manual

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July 2026

Recommended Audience:

- **EHE officers**
- **CME teams**
- **SEND staff**
- **Safeguarding leads**
- **School attendance officers**



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Introduction

Purpose

The quality of engagement between Local Authorities and home educating families can have a profound impact on educational outcomes, information sharing, safeguarding confidence and public trust.

This training is designed to help Local Authority staff develop a deeper understanding of what home education actually is in practice, how it works within families, and the wide variety of approaches home educating families may take, how families experience Local Authority involvement, and how positive, proportionate communication can improve both communication and outcomes for children. It is not intended to discourage appropriate Local Authority action where genuine concerns exist regarding a child's education or welfare.

Perspective

This training has been written from the understanding that the majority of professionals involved in elective home education wish to act lawfully, proportionately and in the best interests of children. Equally, most home educating parents are seeking to provide what they genuinely believe to be the most suitable education for their child. While the legal framework and statutory responsibilities are covered later in the training, the primary focus is to provide meaningful insight into the lived reality of home education itself — beyond policies and procedures.

This document is provided free of charge and publicly through Educational Freedom in the hope that it contributes positively to professional understanding, reflective practice and constructive engagement with home educating families.

About The Authors

Educational Freedom is a UK-based, not-for-profit home education information and support organisation that has supported home educating families since 2013. Through our website and social media platforms, we provide information, support, guidance and direct communication with families. Our work is freely accessible to the public and has reached millions of readers.

Over more than a decade, we have worked extensively with families from a wide range of educational approaches and circumstances, including structured home education, autonomous education, SEND provision, exam pathways, school anxiety, trauma recovery, long-term home education, and children who have never attended school.

Alongside our direct work with families, we have engaged with Local Authorities, educational professionals, consultations, policy discussions and national conversations surrounding elective home education. We have also carried out large-scale research into Local Authority practice,



allowing us to identify both positive approaches and areas where misunderstanding, inconsistency or disproportionate practice may unintentionally damage relationships with families.

Many families enter home education unexpectedly following difficulties within the school system. Others have planned to home educate for many years and have chosen it as a deliberate educational philosophy. A constructive relationship between Local Authority and parent benefits everyone.

Educational Freedom



Module 1: Understanding Home Education

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the diversity of reasons families choose home education
 - Identify and challenge common assumptions about home education
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The Changing Face of Home Education

It is important to recognise that home education in the UK has evolved significantly over recent decades. While some older assumptions and representations of home education may still influence professional understanding, the modern home educating community is highly diverse and includes families from a wide range of educational, cultural, social and medical backgrounds.

An increasing number of families now come to home education due to:

- Unmet SEND needs
- School anxiety
- Trauma
- Disability
- Mental health difficulties
- Dissatisfaction with standardised educational approaches
- A desire for more flexible and individualised learning

The growth of online learning, community networks, neurodiversity awareness and alternative educational approaches has also changed how many families experience home education in practice.

Professionals should therefore ensure that their understanding of home education reflects the realities of contemporary home educating families.

Why Families Choose Home Education

Families choose home education for a wide range of reasons. And in some situations home education is not a choice: it is a necessity.



Educational Philosophy

Some parents believe education should be individualised rather than standardised, allowing learning to reflect the child's interests, strengths, pace and preferred methods of learning rather than following a fixed curriculum or school timetable.

They may prefer:

- Child-led learning
- Project-based learning
- Autonomous education
- Classical education
- Montessori approaches
- Other educational philosophies or blended approaches tailored to the individual child

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Many families report that schools struggled to meet their child's needs.

Examples of SEN include:

- Autism
- ADHD
- PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance)
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Social communication difficulties

Children thrive when their needs are met, and educational expectations become flexible and personalised.

Mental Health Issues

Children may leave school due to a range of mental health issues including:

- Anxiety
- School-based trauma
- Bullying
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Emotionally Based School Avoidance



For these families, rebuilding confidence, emotional wellbeing and a positive relationship with learning often becomes the immediate educational priority and forms an important part of the child's education.

Medical Reasons

Some children experience health conditions that make regular school attendance difficult.

For example, a child experiencing severe migraines, chronic pain, gastrointestinal conditions, or treatment for a long-term illness may find the demands of school attendance and the school environment difficult to manage consistently, whereas they are capable of learning effectively in a more flexible home education environment.

Religious or Cultural Reasons

Some families choose home education because they wish to provide an education that aligns more closely with their values or beliefs.

Examples may include families who wish to:

- Incorporate religious teaching or observance more fully into daily life and learning
- Teach aspects of culture, language or heritage that they feel are not sufficiently represented within school
- Prioritise family time, travel or community involvement as part of the child's education
- Provide an education that reflects their views on childhood, wellbeing, pace of learning or assessment

For some families these decisions are based on strongly held beliefs or philosophies. For others, they simply reflect the type of education and upbringing they wish to provide for their children.

Lifestyle and Family Circumstances

For some families, home education offers the flexibility to accommodate circumstances that may be difficult to balance alongside regular school attendance.

Examples include:

- Frequent travel
- Professional sporting commitments
- Performing arts careers

Home education can allow learning to take place around these commitments whilst still providing a suitable and efficient education. In many cases, these experiences can themselves provide valuable educational opportunities and real-world learning experiences that would be difficult to replicate within a traditional school environment.



Because they want to

Some families do not have a specific event, concern or trigger that leads to home education. They simply feel that home education is the right choice for their child and family, or that it better reflects the kind of childhood, family life or educational experience they wish to provide.

There may be no deeper reason than simply wanting to home educate and feeling that it is the right choice for them.

School does not have to have failed for a family to choose to home educate.

Because they have to

Sometimes home education is not a choice; it is borne out of necessity.

Families may feel they have no realistic alternative but to home educate in order to protect their child's wellbeing, meet needs that they feel are not being adequately supported within school, or provide an education that is genuinely suitable for the individual child.

This may arise as a result of unmet SEND needs, severe anxiety or school trauma, bullying, the absence of an appropriate school placement, or where families do not consider alternative provision or Section 19¹ arrangements to be suitable for their child.

For these families, home education is often not about rejecting school in principle, but about responding to circumstances and ensuring that the child can continue to receive an education in an environment where they are able to learn and thrive.

Teachers Who Home Educate Their Own Children

It is important to recognise that some qualified teachers and education professionals choose to home educate their own children, and many do not recreate school at home.

Many teacher-home educators report that their experience within education helped them recognise that children do not all learn effectively within standardised classroom structures.

Some education professionals intentionally choose:

- Flexible learning
- Project-based approaches
- Autonomous education
- Experiential learning
- Highly individualised provision

¹ Section 19 provision refers to education arranged by the Local Authority under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 for children who cannot attend school due to illness, exclusion or other reasons.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/19>



They feel these approaches better suit their own child's needs, personality, wellbeing, or learning style.

This highlights an important principle within home education: professional familiarity with school systems does not automatically mean that school-style education is the most suitable approach for every child.

Read an insight into [why teachers choose to home educate](#).

'Negative reasons'

A seemingly negative reason or knee jerk reaction such as removing the child from school immediately after an argument with school, or in response to an incident in school, should not be used to assume that home education cannot be suitable.

It is often through necessity that families discover home education is the right approach for their child, with many later saying they wish they had made the decision sooner.

The transition can take time. Families may need time to recover from the circumstances that led them to home educate, time to rebuild confidence and wellbeing, and time to understand how their child learns best outside of a school environment.

For many, the early stages involve adjustment, reflection and experimentation. However, once families and children have settled into home education, the outcome is often an education that is far better suited to the child's individual needs, abilities and interests than the provision they previously experienced.

Challenging Common Assumptions

Many professionals have spent much of their careers working within school-based environments. As a result, it is entirely understandable that school experiences and practices may influence expectations about what education and effective learning can look like.

Home education, however, often operates very differently from school and can take many forms. This training provides insight into the wide variety of approaches used by home educating families and helps build understanding of how education may look.

For example, a school child may study history between 10:00 and 11:00 every Tuesday. A home educated child may spend three weeks researching castles, visiting historical sites, reading historical fiction, constructing models and speaking with experts. Both children may learn significant amounts of history; the educational journey simply looks different.



When considering home education provision, it can be helpful to focus on whether the education is suitable for the individual child, rather than on how closely it resembles formal school learning. The legal question is one of suitability, not similarity.

Educational Freedom



Module 2: Deregistration

Learning Objectives

- Understand the legal deregistration process
- Recognise common misinformation provided by schools
- Understand the impact poor deregistration practice has on families
- Understand off-rolling
- Be able to support families using accurate and proportionate information

Deregistration From Mainstream School

In England, the process for deregistering a child from school for elective home education is governed primarily by [The School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)

9.—(1) The proprietor of a school must ensure that the name of a pupil of compulsory school age is deleted from the school's admission register when—

(f) a parent of the pupil has told the proprietor in writing that the pupil will no longer attend the school after a certain day and will receive education otherwise than at school and—

(i) that day has passed; and

(ii) there is no school attendance order naming the school in force in relation to the pupil;

Parents are **not** required to:

- Seek permission from the school
- Attend a meeting before deregistration
- Explain their educational philosophy
- Explain their reason for home educating
- Prove that educational arrangements are already fully established before deregistration takes effect

Once the school receives valid written notification from at least **one parent**², the child should be removed from roll **immediately** and the Local Authority informed in accordance with the Regulations.

² The parent must have parental rights.



Children Attending Special Schools.

Under Regulation 9(2), a child attending a special school cannot usually be removed from roll for elective home education without the consent of the Local Authority.

It is important to remember this is not consent to home educate, that is a primacy of parent decision. It is the Local Authority process of confirming to the school proprietor that they can remove the child from their special school roll as the Local Authority is now aware the child is receiving their education through home education.

Note: a parent deciding to home educate is different to all, including LA, agreeing it is not appropriate for a child to receive education through school, or all, including school, agreeing the child can not attend school at this time. A LA and school should not encourage a parent to deregister to home educate to avoid their responsibilities arising under s19 Education Act 1996 or s61 Children And Families Act 2014. Equally it is not the school or LA's role to undermine a parent with parental responsibilities' decision to home educate.

When a family informs the Local Authority of their decision to home educate, in line with both SENDCOP15³ (10.33) and EHE guidance 2019⁴ (8.6), consent should normally be granted without unnecessary delay or making the process complex and must not be unreasonably withheld.

An EHCP review or a meeting does not need to take place before consent is given.

If the only amendment needed is to remove the school name and confirm parent is home educating in line with section 7 of the Education Act 1996 this can be achieved by using Regulation 28 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014.

Whilst there is no legal requirement for parents to provide detailed information about their home education arrangements when requesting consent, many families choose to provide an outline of how they intend to meet their child's needs, often by reference to Section B of the EHCP. This then allows the LA to assess if section 42(5) of the Children and Families Act 2014 is met and enables the LA to disapply the section 42(2) duty.

If the Local Authority considers there may be aspects of the child's special educational needs identified in Section B that will not be met through the proposed arrangements, it should discuss these with the family, including whether they are still relevant when home educating and if it may exercise its discretion to continue providing some special educational provision where appropriate, to ensure the child's home education is considered holistically.

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dcb85ed915d2ac884d995/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf

⁴

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf6d2bdcb0757928e5bd47/Elective_home_education_departmental_guidance_for_local_authorities.pdf



In addition this also provides the Local Authority with a strong starting point and reassurance that the family has carefully considered its decision and is able to support the child's special educational needs effectively. It may also assist the Local Authority in making a timely decision for both the parent and the special school.

Local authorities should clearly explain the deregistration process for children attending special schools on their website, including:

- When consent is required
- Who the request should be sent to
- What information parents may wish to provide to support their request
- The expected timescales for decision making.

Special schools, SEND teams and EHCP teams should ensure that staff fully understand that the process is not to undermine parental decision making, but to ensure all are on the same page on what therapies and additional SEP may continue once off roll, and what is reasonably required for decision making. Decisions should be based on whether the child's special educational needs, as set out in Section B of the EHCP, will be met when considered holistically, including any SEN that will not be relevant due to the differing nature of home education to classroom-based education, and support the Local Authority may exercise its discretion to provide to assist the home educating family (SEND Code of Practice, 10.30).

Local authorities should not delay consent pending unnecessary meetings, assessments or annual reviews where sufficient information is already available to make the decision. Unnecessary delay may result in a child remaining on a special school roll despite no longer attending and is inconsistent with the expectation that the process should not be made unnecessarily complex or consent unreasonably withheld.

When considering the information available to the Local Authority in deciding whether to consent to a special school removing a child from roll, it is important to remember that, in line with Elective Home Education guidance (2.11) and section 42(5) of the Children and Families Act 2014, there is no requirement for home education to replicate school provision or mirror the child's current support package, provided the family has made suitable alternative educational provision.

Why Deregistration Matters

The deregistration process is often the family's first experience of navigating educational law independently. Many families report that this period is among the most stressful parts of their home education journey.



They are frequently:

- Already overwhelmed as the decision may be an urgent response
- Scared if it was the right decision
- Concerned about making mistakes
- Receiving conflicting advice
- Managing distressed children
- Uncertain about legal requirements

The way professionals respond during this stage can significantly influence future relationships.

Common School Errors

It is important to understand that whilst the majority of schools process deregistration correctly, many wishing the family well, there are some schools who misunderstand the deregistration requirements.

Commonly Heard Statements:

"You need Local Authority approval."

"You need the Headteacher's permission."

"You need to attend a meeting first."

"You can't deregister/need consent when you have an EHCP."

"You need both parents to sign the letter"

"We cannot accept it by email, you need to physically sign a letter."

These statements do not reflect the legal framework surrounding deregistration and may lead to confusion or anxiety for families who are already navigating a significant change.

Delaying Removal from Roll

Some families report experiencing delays in the deregistration process or uncertainty about when deregistration takes effect. During this period, families may receive repeated requests from school for meetings, telephone calls or discussions. Some families report unplanned visits from school welfare staff asking to see the child, stating the school has welfare duties whilst the deregistration process goes through. There are examples where families have been informed that there is a local policy of a buffer/cooling off period before deregistration is actioned.



This may unintentionally leave parents with the impression that permission is required to begin home education or that the decision remains subject to approval by the school or Local Authority.

Where schools wish to ensure that families are aware of available support or alternative options, this information should be provided promptly and without creating unnecessary barriers or delays. Families generally report more positive experiences where communication is clear, information is accurate and the administrative process is completed without unnecessary delay.

Negative Messaging About Home Education

Parents report being told:

"You will ruin your child's future."

"Universities won't accept home educated children."

"Social services will become involved."

"I don't think you will be able to cope. How will you teach 3 young children?"

Many of these comments arise from misunderstandings about home education and are often made without malicious intent. However, they can cause considerable distress and anxiety for both parents and children.

This can especially happen where families have given prior notice of their decision to deregister and the child continues to attend.

Some children report being told:

'You won't have any friends'

'You won't get a job'

Or being quizzed by a teacher asking if the parent has planned lessons and a timetable.

Some have experienced being told their parents are breaking the law.

When this is a family's first experience of home education it can have a lasting impact on the family's confidence and their future relationship with professionals. Delays to deregistration, discouraging messages and treating children as though they are making a harmful or unlawful choice can create unnecessary distress at what is often already a difficult time for the family.



Understanding Off-Rolling

Off-rolling⁵ refers to situations where a school removes, encourages, or pressures a pupil to leave the school roll primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the child. This may include attempts to avoid accountability for attendance, behaviour, attainment, exclusion figures or inspection outcomes by removing pupils from the school roll.

This may include situations where:

- Parents feel pressured to deregister
- Inaccurate information about home education is provided
- Parents are led to believe the Local Authority will provide the education (similar to EOTIS⁶)
- Families are encouraged to avoid exclusion processes
- Schools suggest home education as the only solution without properly exploring support options

Many families make genuine and informed decisions to home educate following difficulties within school. A decision to home educate following school difficulties does not automatically mean off-rolling has occurred.

Where concerns about potential off-rolling arise:

- Listen carefully and objectively
- Distinguish between parental choice and school pressure
- Ensure families receive accurate information about their rights
- Avoid treating the family with suspicion simply because concerns exist regarding the school's actions

It is therefore important in initial communications to respectfully point out to parents that they should contact you if they feel the school has unlawfully off-rolled their child.

The focus should remain on supporting lawful educational choices while identifying situations where families may have felt improperly pressured or unsupported.

⁵

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education/children-missing-education-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-schools>

⁶ Education Other Than In School, sometimes referred to as EOTAS



How To Avoid Misinformation

When families receive inaccurate information:

- Families become reluctant to engage with authorities
- Confidence in official information may be reduced

Local Authorities should therefore ensure all available information and instruction is accurate, legally sound and balanced. Encouraging schools to understand the deregistration process before encountering it will limit potential harm and upset. Establishing a positive relationship between Local Authorities, professionals and families is vital. Getting this right from the start will make it much more likely that all parties are able to work together in the best interests of the child.



Module 3: First Contact With Families

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of respectful first contact
- Understand why written communication is often preferable
- Avoid practices that may be experienced as unnecessarily formal or disproportionate
- Build relationships through clarity and transparency
- Establish a supportive rather than authoritative relationship

Why First Contact Is So Important

Multiple public service areas consistently demonstrate that first impressions influence future engagement.

Families often remember their first interaction with the Local Authority years later.

A respectful introduction can establish trust.

An overly formal or enforcement-focused introduction can create long-lasting barriers.

[Appendix 1](#) shares many thoughts from home educating parents about their interactions with their Local Authority.

Best Practice - First Contact with a Family

For many families, their first interaction with the Local Authority will shape their perception of the EHE service and influence how they communicate in the future.

First contact should therefore be made in writing, it should:

- Be clear about the purpose of the communication
- Include the name, role and contact details of the officer making contact
- Be welcoming, informative and proportionate
- Include accurate information about home education
- Include an explanation of the Local Authority's role (with legal jargon explained)⁷
- Provide details of any local and national support, services or opportunities available

⁷ 3.6 of

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf6d2bdcb0757928e5bd47/Elective_home_education_departmental_guidance_for_local_authorities.pdf



The initial contact should avoid making assumptions about the family's educational approach, motivations or circumstances. Many families are new to home education and may still be finding their feet, particularly where home education follows difficult experiences in school or arises unexpectedly.

A positive first interaction can help establish trust, encourage constructive engagement and reduce misunderstandings for both families and professionals.

Suggested template communications can be found in [Module 15](#) of this training manual.

Avoiding Unannounced Visits and Telephone Contact

Unannounced visits are often perceived as disproportionate, intrusive or intimidating. Unless there are safeguarding concerns requiring immediate action, they should generally be avoided.

Telephone calls may be appropriate where families have requested them or where an established relationship already exists. However, telephone contact should not replace written communication and families should always have access to information in writing.

There have been instances of telephone calls and doorstep visits where the Local Authority employee has not fully explained their role or the purpose of the contact, causing confusion and unnecessary anxiety. This can be exacerbated where titles such as teacher or welfare officer are used without a clear explanation that the contact relates to elective home education. Clear identification as an EHE officer, EHE team member or EHE support worker can help avoid misunderstandings.

An unexpected visit or telephone call may result in a parent inadvertently failing to provide information that would otherwise satisfy a written informal enquiry. Parents may not immediately recall specific examples of educational activities, explain the reasoning behind their approach or describe provision that has developed naturally over time.

Parents may also feel under pressure to engage immediately, even when they are busy, working, caring for children, attending appointments or simply unprepared for a detailed discussion about their educational provision. Many people find it difficult to decline a conversation with a professional who has contacted them unexpectedly.

As a result, parents may provide only brief or incomplete answers despite having a suitable educational provision in place. Equally, officers may not ask all of the follow-up questions necessary to gain a full understanding of the education being provided. This can result in an incomplete picture of an otherwise suitable education and may lead to unnecessary concerns, further enquiries or escalation that could have been avoided had the family been given time to prepare or respond in writing.



Many families describe experiencing unannounced contact as stressful or feeling that they are being assessed rather than supported, regardless of the intention behind the contact. Parents sometimes describe feeling under suspicion or concerned that declining immediate access or discussion may have negative consequences.

Regardless of intention, this can make constructive engagement more difficult.

Positive Communication

Ultimately, home educating families and Local Authorities want the same outcome: children receiving a suitable education in which they are able to learn, develop and thrive.

Positive relationships are built through respect, clear communication and an understanding that home education varies considerably. When families feel listened to rather than assessed, and supported rather than scrutinised, they are more likely to communicate openly and constructively.

Good practice benefits everyone involved. It reduces conflict, improves communication, helps officers obtain the information they need and allows resources to be focused where they are genuinely required.

The most effective home education teams are often those that families describe not as enforcers or monitors, but as knowledgeable professionals who understand home education, communicate proportionately and recognise parents as the people with the greatest understanding of their own child.



Module 4: Understanding Deschooling

Learning Objectives

- Understand the purpose of deschooling
 - Understand that educational adjustment takes time
-

What Is Deschooling?

Deschooling is a period of adjustment following departure from formal schooling.

Children often need time to:

- Recover confidence
- Rebuild self-esteem
- Rediscover interests
- Develop intrinsic motivation
- Explore learning styles
- Discover what does and doesn't work for the family

For some children this lasts weeks. For others it may last many months.

Many experienced home educating families and professionals consider deschooling valuable for the success of home education. Education is still taking place from day 1, but it's a time where the education will evolve whilst exploration and observing takes place. The parent, having noted how the child is adjusting to home education, is more likely to be able to support their child to learn in the way that suits them best. The parent is therefore in a better position to facilitate successful outcomes in their child's educational journey.

The Importance Of Deschooling

The [2019 DfE Elective Home Education guidance](#) describes deschooling as a period that may involve little or no education. However, many home educating families describe deschooling not as an absence of education, but as a period of adjustment during which learning continues in different ways while new routines and approaches develop.

Example: a child is deregistered from school after a period of not being able to learn in the classroom due to being overwhelmed, they leave school believing they are stupid and unable to learn.



Option 1, From day one, the parent pushes the child to read daily, practice time tables, use an app for literacy and to attend science group sessions. The child on week 5 hits complete burnout and is unable to engage at all, they are incredibly upset and anxious, worse than when they were in school. They now hide away in their bedroom refusing to interact with the family. Home education is declared a failure.

Option 2. During quiet visits to the library with mum there is no pressure to pick up a book, but mum leads by example and sits and reads for a while. The child picks up a couple of books and glances at them but puts them back. Activities such as baking and shopping are carried out without turning them into 'lessons'. Conversations about budgeting for saving up for a new bike are had. There are visits to grandparents and extended family, these provide an opportunity for natural learning through shared experiences. Eventually the child starts to ask questions, to show an interest in learning, and the family settle on a semi structured style of education. This means the child has chosen a workbook to use and a website for numeracy and literacy, they have joined a forest school and take part in an online science club. On week 12 the child is happy, learning and excited to learn. It took time to deschool but without that period of adjustment the child would not be ok.

In this example, option 1 proved unsuitable for the child because it recreates the pressure that contributed to difficulties in school. In option 2, the education suited the child and evolved with them as they settled in.

Deschooling is not an indication that the child is not properly educated, it is a sign that the parent understands that rushing into something is not how to ensure a suitable education is taking place. This is not time lost, it is time gained in the long run.

Deschooling should not be viewed negatively; rather, it is a valuable process that enables learners to move beyond ingrained assumptions about education and engage more meaningfully with learning. By fostering greater autonomy and curiosity, deschooling supports both personal and educational development..

Why Deschooling Is Important

Many children leave school after prolonged stress.

Immediately replicating school structures can:

- Reinforce negative associations
- Increase anxiety
- Reduce engagement

Deschooling allows educational relationships to be rebuilt.



What Deschooling May Look Like

Children may spend time:

- Reading independently
- Exploring hobbies
- Visiting museums
- Watching educational documentaries
- Developing practical skills
- Engaging in community activities
- Engaging with local social networks
- Receiving counselling
- Rebuilding poor health, sleep or eating issues

Learning continues even when it does not resemble formal education.

Risks of Replicating School Too Quickly

Some families who immediately attempt to replicate school structures find that within a few months the child:

- Refuses to engage
- Has not learned how to self lead or investigate
- Has not learned how to self regulate
- Does not know how to seek out learning opportunities
- Becomes disillusioned with home education as the parent is trying to be the teacher.

For some children, recreating school structures at the start of home education may reproduce the same pressures and difficulties that contributed to problems within school.

For others, conflict can arise when the child realises that they do not want their parent to become their teacher in the traditional sense and instead want greater flexibility, autonomy or choice over how they learn. A level of resentment can develop if home education feels like school has simply moved into the family home.

Some families also find that attempting timetables, lessons and routines can place unnecessary pressure on family relationships, particularly where the child is recovering from anxiety, burnout, trauma or negative educational experiences.

Deschooling can provide an opportunity for families to rebuild trust in learning, develop new routines and discover educational approaches that better suit the child and family as a whole.



Helping families understand the importance of deschooling and finding an educational approach that is appropriate for the individual child can provide a far stronger foundation for successful home education. This reduces the risk of home education being viewed as unsuccessful simply because the child did not respond well to a school-style approach recreated at home.

Understanding deschooling can therefore help you understand newly home educating families' approach.

Expectations Following Deregistration

Local Authorities should be cautious about expecting families to demonstrate a fully established home education immediately following deregistration.

Children themselves may need a period of deschooling and adjustment before fully settling into home education. Home education often begins during periods of significant change, including school-related trauma, bullying, unmet SEND (special educational needs and disability), anxiety, bereavement or family crisis.

Parents are highly likely to need time to deschool too. To step back and see learning all around them, allowing the child to take the lead, to not worry when learning does not look like school. Parents may require time to research educational approaches, obtain resources, connect with local groups and understand their legal responsibilities.

It is therefore reasonable to introduce yourself, provide links to local and national groups, and then to allow a family two to three months to work with their child to find the most appropriate learning style to facilitate the optimum home education for the child.

Equally, you should recognise that home educating families, like all families, take holidays, visit relatives, attend family events and experience interruptions to routine. Always take into consideration periods such as school holidays, Christmas, summer breaks or pre-booked family holidays when considering how long a family has realistically had to establish home education.

Considerations of suitability should therefore take account of the individual circumstances, the length of time the child has actually been home educated, and whether the educational provision appears to be developing appropriately over a reasonable period.

Further reading: [Deschooling](#). And [the importance of not creating school at home](#).



Module 5: Understanding Educational Diversity

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module you should:

- Understand that there is no legally recognised "correct" method of home education
- Recognise the wide range of educational philosophies used by home educating families
- Understand why different children thrive under different educational approaches
- Understand educational suitability based on the individual child rather than how closely education resembles school
- Appreciate that many families combine multiple approaches and that educational styles often evolve over time

There Is No Single Way to Home Educate

One of the greatest differences between school and home education is the freedom for education to be designed around the individual child.

Two children of the same age may both be receiving a suitable education while learning in completely different ways.

One child may spend Monday morning completing maths worksheets before attending an online science lesson.

Another may spend the same morning repairing a bicycle with a parent, calculating gear ratios, researching how brakes work and writing a shopping list for replacement parts.

Both children may be developing mathematics, literacy, science, problem solving and practical skills.

Neither approach is inherently better.



Educational Diversity

Educational diversity exists because children are diverse.

Families therefore adapt education to suit the child rather than expecting the child to adapt to a predetermined educational model.

Not every home educating family uses labels or specific terminology to describe their educational approach. Some families may combine multiple approaches, while others simply follow what works for their child without identifying with a particular educational philosophy..

Educational Styles Exist on a Spectrum

Home education is often described using labels such as:

- Structured
- Semi-structured
- Autonomous
- Child-led
- Unschooling

These labels can be useful for describing approaches but should never be treated as fixed categories.

Many families use elements of several different styles.

Autonomous/Child Led/Unschooling Education

Learning follows the child, not a timetable.

Child-led (also known as autonomous or unschooling) home education is an educational philosophy in which learning is driven primarily by the child's interests, questions, curiosity and experiences rather than a predetermined curriculum or timetable.

This does **not** mean children are left to educate themselves.

Parents remain actively involved. Their role is to observe, facilitate, provide opportunities, suggest ideas, answer questions, obtain resources and create an environment where learning naturally flourishes.

Learning is responsive rather than prescribed.



A child fascinated by birds may spend several weeks identifying species, researching migration, visiting nature reserves, sketching wildlife, reading books, calculating wingspans, recording observations and discussing conservation. Through one interest they may develop literacy, mathematics, science, geography, computing, critical thinking and communication skills.

Learning often happens through:

- Reading
- Conversation
- Documentaries
- Museums
- Practical projects
- Hobbies
- Travel
- Volunteering
- Cooking
- Gaming
- Online research
- Everyday life.

Children may study one topic intensely before moving onto another, later returning with a deeper understanding. This is entirely normal within autonomous education.

The Parent's Role

Parents facilitate learning by:

- Providing books and resources
- Introducing new ideas
- Arranging activities and outings
- Discussing learning
- Encouraging curiosity
- Ensuring the child continues to develop across all areas of life.

They know what their child is learning, even if there is no written timetable.

Common Misunderstandings

Autonomous education is **not**:

- A lack of education
- Educational neglect
- Allowing unrestricted screen time
- Absence of parental involvement



- Waiting for learning to happen accidentally.

Examples of Learning

A child who enjoys Minecraft may learn:

- Mathematics through coordinates and measurement
- Electronics through Redstone circuits
- Programming
- Architecture
- Geology
- Collaborative working
- Budgeting on multiplayer servers.

A child who enjoys baking may naturally develop:

- Fractions
- Weighing and measuring
- Chemistry
- Reading
- Budgeting
- Planning.

What Officers Should Consider

Rather than asking:

"Which subjects have they done work in?"

consider asking:

"Can you tell me about what your child has been interested in recently, and how you have supported that learning?"

The topic may not appear on the national curriculum. There may not be Key Stage or other level comparisons used. The parent will be able to explain how it is suitable for the child because the child enjoys the learning, finds it challenging but not overwhelming, or easy to do without it being too simple etc.

Parents should not be expected to explain the education in terms other than what they use in their education.

There are differing degrees of autonomy from semi-structured through to radical unschooling, all valuable if they are the right approach for the child.



Semi-Structured Home Education

A balance between guidance and flexibility.

Semi-structured home education combines planned learning with flexibility and is one of the most common approaches used by home educating families.

Parents usually provide structure for some subjects while allowing the child greater freedom in others.

For example, a child may complete mathematics each morning, read daily and work towards GCSEs while history, science or art are explored through projects, visits, documentaries or personal interests.

The education adapts as the child's interests and needs develop.

Typical Features

Semi-structured education may include:

- Planned lessons
- Textbooks
- Online resources
- Educational games
- Practical projects
- Museums
- Discussion
- Experiments
- Hobbies
- Community groups.

Routines can exist but remain flexible.

If a child becomes fascinated by Roman Britain during a museum visit, the family may spend several weeks exploring the topic in depth before returning to other planned work.

The Parent's Role

Parents provide:

- Direction
- Resources
- Encouragement
- Flexibility
- Opportunities for independent learning.



They continually adapt provision depending on what is working well.

Examples of Learning

A child studying Ancient Egypt may:

- Read historical texts
- Build pyramids from recycled materials
- Calculate dimensions
- Research archaeology
- Visit museums
- Write stories set in Ancient Egypt
- Create artwork inspired by hieroglyphics.

This single topic naturally develops knowledge across multiple areas.

Strengths

Semi-structured learning offers:

- Flexibility
- Routine where beneficial
- Opportunities to follow interests
- Personalised pace
- Reduced pressure
- Wide range of educational experiences.

What Officers Should Consider

Education may not follow a rigid timetable every day.

Instead, consider:

- How is learning happening, is there flexibility or a plan?
- How the child is progressing
- How education is adapted to meet their individual needs.

The educational structure exists to support the child—not the other way around.



Structured Home Education

A planned educational approach tailored to the individual child.

Structured home education most closely resembles school, although important differences remain.

Families generally follow a planned programme of learning with regular lessons, routines and educational goals.

Many use published curricula, online schools, tutors or recognised educational resources.

Some children complete GCSEs, IGCSEs or alternative qualifications.

Others work beyond or below age-related expectations according to their individual needs.

Typical Features

Structured home education may include:

- Timetables
- Subject-based learning
- Textbooks
- Worksheets
- Online lessons
- Planned projects
- Educational software
- Assessments.

Parents usually plan learning in advance while retaining the flexibility to change pace when needed.

Unlike school, one-to-one teaching allows learning to continue until genuine understanding has been achieved without needing to move on because of a timetable.

The Parent's Role

Parents act as:

- Facilitator
- Mentor
- Organiser

Learning is continually adapted around the child's strengths, interests and any additional needs.



Examples of Learning

A structured week may include:

- Daily mathematics
- English lessons
- Science experiments
- History studies
- Foreign languages
- PE through sports clubs
- Music tuition
- Practical cookery

Although structured, opportunities for real-world learning remain important.

Common Misunderstandings

Structured home education should not be assumed to be identical to school.

Families often benefit from:

- Smaller teaching groups
- Flexible lesson lengths
- Immediate support
- Individual pacing
- Personalised resources
- Greater depth of study.

What Officers Should Consider

Structured home education will often produce familiar evidence such as:

- Workbooks
- Exercise books
- Plans
- Assessments
- Online learning records.

However, suitability should still be considered whether the education meets the individual child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs—not by comparing it with school provision.



Project-Based Learning

Many home educating families use project-based approaches.

A project may begin with a single interest and expand into multiple subjects.

For example, a child interested in space exploration may study:

- Physics
- Mathematics
- History
- Geography
- Engineering
- Computing
- Writing and communication skills

The learning is integrated rather than divided into separate lessons.

Project-based learning often develops:

- Independent research skills
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Creativity
- Motivation

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning involves learning through direct experience.

Examples include:

- Museum visits
- Volunteering
- Travel
- Outdoor learning
- Gardening
- Running small businesses
- Practical projects

Learning may occur in real-world contexts rather than formal educational settings..

These outcomes may be difficult to capture through traditional educational measures but remain valuable educational experiences.



Community-Based Learning

Many home educated children participate in extensive community learning opportunities.

These may include:

- Sports clubs
- Drama groups
- Scouts and Guides
- Youth organisations
- Home education groups
- Community projects
- Volunteering opportunities

Learning often occurs through interaction with people of different ages and backgrounds.

Community-based learning can support:

- Social development
- Leadership skills
- Confidence
- Teamwork
- Citizenship

Online Learning

Online learning has become increasingly common.

Some children access:

- Live online classes
- Recorded lessons
- Virtual tutors
- Educational platforms

Online provision may form:

- Part of the home education
- The majority of educational provision



- A supplementary resource

The parent will still remain responsible for ensuring the education is suitable, and should it be required they would be able to explain what has been learned.

Mixed Approaches

Many families do not fit neatly into a single educational category.

A child may:

- Use online mathematics courses
- Learn science through practical experiments
- Study history through projects
- Develop literacy through reading and discussion

Educational approaches often evolve over time.

A change in style/approach should be seen in a positive way, whether it's down to realising one approach was not working, or because the child wants to try something different, all that matters is that the parent is providing what is suitable.

Educational Outcomes

Questions such as:

- How many hours are spent learning?
- Which curriculum is used?
- How many worksheets are completed?

may reveal relatively little about actual learning.

Instead:

- What opportunities exist?
- How does learning take place?
- What progress is being made?
- How does the provision meet the child's needs?

will result in meaningful responses.

Educational success may look different for different children.



A suitable education for one child may not be suitable for another.

Read more about [different styles of home education](#)

Purpose, Plans and Goals

Whilst trying to understand the suitability of the education, some Local Authorities ask families about their educational goals, purpose, reasoning or intended outcomes. Whilst these questions may fit some approaches to home education, they do not align with all educational philosophies.

For some families, there is no predetermined destination, curriculum pathway or list of objectives that the child is expected to achieve by a particular age or stage. Instead, the educational purpose is to support the child's natural curiosity, interests and development wherever these may lead.

In child-led and autonomous approaches, following the child's interests is not the absence of a plan or purpose; it is the plan and the purpose. Learning opportunities are identified and developed as they arise, allowing education to remain responsive to the individual child rather than requiring the child to conform to predetermined outcomes.

As a result, some families may be unable to provide explanations about purpose or educational targets, not because education lacks direction, but because their educational philosophy is based upon allowing that direction to emerge naturally over time.



Module 6: A Day in the Life of Home Education

Learning Objectives

- Develop a practical understanding of how home education may look in everyday life
 - Recognise the diversity of educational approaches used by home educating families
 - Recognise how SEND, disability, trauma and personality may affect daily routines
 - Understand how resources are used
 - Understand that educational provision may look very different between families while still being suitable
-

Introduction

Some families follow structured routines similar to school. Others use flexible, autonomous or blended approaches. Many adapt learning according to:

- The child's needs
- Health
- Interests
- SEND
- Emotional wellbeing
- Stage of recovery from school-related difficulties

This module aims to help you develop a realistic understanding of how home education may look in everyday life.

The examples below are not intended to represent “ideal” home education. Rather, they demonstrate the diversity of approaches that may still constitute suitable education.



Important Principles

There Is No Single “Correct” Home Education Routine

Home education may:

- Take place at different times of day
- Occur in short bursts
- Happen through conversation and experience
- Involve independent learning
- Include online learning
- Vary significantly between days
- Change over time

A suitable education does not need to look the same from one family to another. Or even between children in the same family. It may not have a routine at all.

Learning Often Happens Outside Formal Learning

Children may learn through:

- Hobbies
 - Projects
 - Practical activities
 - Gaming
 - Discussion
 - Reading
 - Travel
 - Volunteering
 - Documentaries
 - Community activities
 - Online resources
 - Everyday life experiences
-

Home Education and Working Parents

Some home educating families have one parent at home full-time, while others balance home education alongside employment, self-employment, flexible working, shift work, remote work, caring responsibilities, or support from wider family and community networks.



Home education does not require parents to be providing education 9-3 during weekdays and term times.

Families may use a tutor, a child-care provider, share care with other home educators, or have family who help out. Parents remain fully aware of the learning other adults are providing.

Older children and teenagers may also work increasingly independently, managing aspects of their own learning with parental guidance, support, oversight, and access to resources.

Many working home educating parents describe home education as being integrated into family life rather than separated into fixed education hours.

Resources and Their Suitability

Understanding the educational benefits of the resources commonly used within home education can greatly assist professionals when considering the suitability of provision and interpreting the information provided by families.

Home educating families often use a wide range of resources. These may include books, documentaries, educational websites, games, apps, museums, hobbies, practical activities, online communities, videos and real-world experiences.

When a parent describes a particular resource or activity, they are often communicating far more than simply how a child spends their time. Understanding the skills, knowledge and opportunities that can arise from different resources helps provide context to what the family is describing.

For example, a computer game may involve literacy, numeracy, strategic thinking, teamwork, communication, problem solving, budgeting, research or creativity. A game such as Minecraft may involve planning, design, mathematics, engineering concepts, resource management, reading, following instructions, collaboration with others and learning through experimentation and problem solving.

Similarly, cooking may involve mathematics, science, literacy and practical life skills, whilst hobbies and personal interests may provide opportunities for communication, perseverance, planning and independent learning.

Parents should not be expected to identify, record or justify every individual piece of learning that occurs as a result of using a particular resource. A parent stating that a child regularly uses a resource that has recognised educational value may itself provide useful information about the educational opportunities available to the child.



The more familiar you are with the educational potential of a wide variety of resources, the easier it becomes to understand what a parent is describing and how those resources may contribute towards a suitable education.

How SEND, disability, trauma and personality may affect daily routines.

A child's daily routine may look very different depending on their individual needs, experiences and temperament. Children with SEND, disabilities, chronic health conditions or past trauma may require additional rest, recovery time, flexibility or reassurance throughout the day.

For example, a child with chronic fatigue may need regular breaks, a child with anxiety may work best later in the day once they feel settled, whilst an autistic child may require predictable routines or time to recover following social activities or sensory overload.

Personality also plays a role. Some children thrive on busy schedules and group activities, whilst others prefer quieter environments, solitary interests or long periods of focus on a single subject.

A routine that appears unusual to others may be entirely appropriate and necessary for that individual child.



Example 1: The Structured GCSE Family

Background

A 15-year-old home educated child is studying towards GCSEs after leaving school aged 13 due to bullying and anxiety. The child struggled to function for the first 6 months, afraid to leave the house, and saw learning as a battle. With time and support they understood that their future options included needing 5 GCSEs which they have decided to do in one exam season.

A Typical Day

The child chooses to wake at approximately 8:30am and begins the morning with online mathematics tuition. They then complete independent English work using revision guides and online resources. The parent goes over the work completed to check for a full understanding of the learning.

After lunch, the child works on science past exam papers, watches educational videos about science experiments and attends a local sports activity in the afternoon.

Evenings are often used for:

- Reading
- Revision
- Meeting up with his best friend, or gaming online with friends
- Feedback from the parent on the previous days learning

Some days are more productive than others, particularly when anxiety levels are high.

Flexibility remains important. The family adapts expectations according to the child's wellbeing and anxiety levels. The teen is able to self regulate their emotions and express when they need a less formal day.



Example 2: The Autonomous Learner

Background

An 11-year-old child has been home educated from an early age and follows a highly autonomous educational approach.

A Typical Day

The child begins the morning by continuing a group Minecraft engineering project involving complex virtual structures and resource management.

This leads to discussions about:

- Geometry
- Physics
- Budgeting
- Architecture

Later in the day the child:

- Watches documentaries about space exploration
- Researches black holes independently
- Visits the library
- Spends time writing stories inspired by science fiction books

No formal timetable is used. Learning develops organically through interests, projects and discussion.

The child is engaging in:

- Problem solving
- Literacy
- Research
- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- Independent learning

The parent is never too far away to answer any questions, and to observe what is being learned. The parent makes sure there are plenty of learning materials accessible for the child to explore when they wish.

Some days are spent at the local home education group, meeting their friends of various ages, engaging in craft activities, sports events, den building etc. These are usually once a week. But on a busy week it can be 3-4 times depending on what activities are available.



Example 3: The SEND Burnout Recovery Family

Background

A 13-year-old autistic child with severe school anxiety recently left school after years of distress and emotionally based school avoidance.

A Typical Day

The child wakes late due to exhaustion and disrupted sleep patterns caused by previous anxiety and burnout.

The morning is spent:

- Gaming with friends
- Listening to audiobooks
- Engaging in calming sensory activities

In the afternoon the child may:

- Complete short bursts of mathematics on a website
- Watch educational YouTube content
- Research specialist interests
- Engage in one-to-one learning with a parent

Some days the family's immediate priority is learning about:

- Emotional recovery
- Regulation
- Rebuilding the child's confidence around learning

On days where they feel able, the family go for a walk, and after considerable months they are now able to engage with other walkers, and enjoy pointing out different wildlife.

The child is recovering from significant distress and the family is adapting learning around the child's needs and capacity.

Full-time in this case includes lots of recovery time, necessary at that time. Anything different would lead to complete burn out and an inability to function again.



Example 4: The Community-Based Learner

Background

A 9-year-old child learns primarily through community activities and practical experiences.

A Typical Week

The child regularly attends:

- Forest school sessions
- Home education groups
- Swimming
- Museum visits
- Gardening projects
- Baking activities

Learning also takes place through:

- Reading
- Conversation
- Games
- Practical mathematics
- Creative projects at home

The family does not separate learning into formal “subjects”, understanding the education suitability requires consideration of what is involved in each activity.

The child is developing:

- Communication skills
 - Physical skills
 - Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Social understanding
 - Practical knowledge through real-life experiences
-



Example 5: The Introverted Teenager

Background

A 14-year-old home educated teenager prefers quieter environments and independent hobbies, has an avid interest in computer science and music. .

A Typical Day

The teenager spends much of the day:

- Coding
- Composing music
- Reading
- Communicating with online friends who share similar interests

They occasionally attend local activities but generally prefer:

- One-to-one interaction
- Online communities
- Independent projects

The child is academically advanced in several areas but finds large social groups exhausting. They may know college is not possible for them, so they have been looking into online university courses instead of the traditional GCSEs and A levels.

Not all children thrive in highly social or group-based environments.

This child may still have:

- Meaningful relationships
 - Strong communication skills
 - Healthy emotional development despite limited participation in organised activities
-



Example 6: The Family in Crisis

Background

Having home educated for 6 years, a parent has recently experienced bereavement and temporary housing instability while continuing to home educate their children.

A Typical Day

Some days involve:

- Structured educational activities
- Reading
- Practical learning
- Attending organised home education group

Other days are less structured due to:

- Appointments
- Emotional strain
- Practical difficulties

These days can involve a low pressure fact-time call with a cousin of a similar age, or if able to, they will meet in the library.

The family prioritises:

- Stability
- Emotional wellbeing
- Maintaining educational continuity during a difficult period

Temporary disruption or a change in approach during periods of crisis is to be expected and does not infer an unsuitable education. This family has always provided a suitable education, with no concerns ever being raised. They do not take 'school holidays' off from learning, as informal learning has continued all year round. This temporary change will not affect the educational outcomes for these children.



Example 7: The Child Who Is 'Behind'

Background

Aged 13, the child was deregistered from secondary school after years of struggling with reading and writing. Despite significant effort, they remained well below age-related expectations and had become increasingly withdrawn and anxious. Repeated experiences of failure and bullying had led the child to believe they were "stupid" and incapable of learning.

The parent recognised that continuing to focus on what the child could not do was damaging both confidence and motivation. Rather than attempting to continue at a secondary school level, they made the decision to take learning back to basics and rebuild the child's foundations from the ground up.

A Typical Day

The day begins with practical activities that incorporate literacy and numeracy naturally and without pressure. Reading may involve recipes, instructions, signs, subtitles or shared reading with a parent rather than age-expected novels or textbooks.

Writing activities focus on confidence and success rather than quantity or complexity. The child may practice writing shopping lists, messages, labels or short sentences related to their interests.

Mathematics is revisited from an earlier level to identify gaps in understanding and rebuild core skills that may have been missed or not fully understood during school.

Alongside this, the child spends time pursuing personal interests, engaging in hobbies, social activities and learning opportunities that allow them to experience success and develop confidence in their abilities.

Suitability does not require a child to be working at age-related expectations or following a school curriculum at the expected pace. In this case, the parent has identified that the child's immediate educational needs are confidence, self-belief and secure foundations in literacy and numeracy.

Rebuilding understanding from the basics can be more effective than continuing to move forward while fundamental gaps remain. The educational objective is not simply to reach the next topic, but to ensure that the child develops the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to continue learning successfully in the future.

You can find more information about [what home education looks like day to day in this article](#).



Home education is highly diverse. Suitable education can take place through structured study, autonomous learning, practical experiences, community activities, online learning or blended approaches. Developing a realistic understanding of how home education functions in everyday life helps reduce assumptions, improve communication and support more proportionate decision making.



Module 7: Understanding the Child's Experience of Home Education

Learning Objectives

- Understand that children may experience home education very differently depending on their background and circumstances
 - Recognise that home education is often integrated into family life rather than existing as a separate activity
 - Understand the experiences of both always home educated children and children who have transitioned from school
 - Recognise the importance of boredom
 - Consider home education from the child's perspective rather than solely through adult educational expectations
-

Home Education as Part of Life

For many home educated children, education is not something that happens to them between certain hours of the day. It is simply part of life.

It is not simply school taking place in a different building. It is a fundamentally different way of experiencing childhood, learning and family life.

Learning is often woven naturally throughout the day. Knowledge, skills and understanding develop through conversations, hobbies, practical activities, interests, experiences and everyday life, without needing to be separated into lessons or formally identified as "education".

Many home educated children become highly confident in:

- Asking questions
- Pursuing interests
- Communicating with people of different ages
- Managing aspects of their own learning
- Solving problems independently
- Developing practical life skills

Because learning is flexible and individualised, children are often able to spend extensive periods of time exploring areas of deep interest and curiosity. Topics may develop organically over days, weeks or months, allowing children to build detailed knowledge and strong research skills through genuine engagement.



Home education also allows daily life to move at the pace most appropriate for the child and family. Some children are highly active and constantly exploring, while others prefer quieter days focused on reading, creating, researching or practical activities at home. Both approaches may provide rich and meaningful educational experiences.

Children Who Have Never Attended School

Children who have always been home educated often experience home education simply as normal life.

They may not consider themselves to be receiving an alternative education because they have never known anything different.

They have been able to:

- Continue exploring a topic because they are interested in it
- Take breaks when needed
- Spend an afternoon following an unexpected opportunity
- Alter their plans when something exciting becomes available

Children who have never attended school may not:

- Think in terms of school subjects
 - Understand year groups or key stages
 - Use educational terminology
 - View learning as something separate from everyday life
-

Children Transitioning from School

Children who move from school to home education often experience a significant change in how learning feels.

For some children, home education may initially feel unfamiliar or unsettling after years of externally imposed routines and expectations.

For others, it can feel like relief.

Children frequently describe appreciating:

- Greater flexibility
- Reduced time pressures



- Fewer unnecessary transitions
- The ability to work at their own pace
- Having more influence over their daily lives

Some children enjoy being able to spend longer on topics they find interesting and less time on those they already understand. Others value the ability to learn in quieter environments or in ways that better suit their individual needs.

For children who left school due to bullying, anxiety, unmet needs or negative experiences, home education may initially be experienced less as education and more as safety, recovery and breathing space.

For these children, rebuilding confidence and wellbeing may be an important educational priority before academic learning becomes the primary focus.

Freedom and Responsibility

Many home educated children experience greater freedom than their schooled peers.

However, this often comes alongside increased responsibility.

Children may be more involved in:

- Planning aspects of their own learning
- Organising their time
- Managing projects and interests
- Communicating with adults
- Developing practical life skills

The amount of responsibility given will vary considerably depending on age, personality and family approach. Some children thrive with high levels of independence, whilst others prefer more structure and guidance.

The Importance of Boredom

Many home educating families view periods of boredom very differently from schools or structured educational environments.

In school, time is often planned and directed by adults, with relatively little opportunity for children to decide for themselves how they wish to spend unstructured time.



At home, periods of boredom are often seen not as a problem to be solved, but as an opportunity for creativity, curiosity and self-direction to emerge.

Children may use this time to invent games, explore interests, build projects, read, create, research or simply think.

Not every moment needs to be productive, educational, planned in advance or led by a parent. Rest, reflection and unstructured time are important parts of childhood and can contribute to independence, problem solving and intrinsic motivation.

For some children, particularly those recovering from stressful educational experiences, learning to be comfortable with free time and personal choice can itself be an important part of the transition to home education.

Understanding Individual Experiences

Just as there is no single school experience, there is no single home education experience.

Some children thrive with structure and routine. Some thrive with flexibility and autonomy. Some spend much of their time in the community, whilst others prefer quieter home-based learning. Some pursue qualifications early, whilst others take a less conventional route.

Understanding home education therefore requires understanding the child experiencing it, rather than the educational method alone.



Module 8: Socialisation, Social Development and Understanding Different Needs

Learning Objectives

- Understand that social development is highly individual
 - Recognise that socialisation occurs in many different ways and settings
 - Understand that not all children are able to participate comfortably in regular outside activities or large group environments
 - Recognise how SEND, disability, anxiety, trauma and mental health may affect a child's ability to go out
 - Distinguish between social preference, temporary withdrawal and genuine isolation
 - Avoid treating reduced outside activity as automatic evidence of unsuitable education or safeguarding concern
-

Introduction

One of the most persistent misconceptions surrounding home education is the belief that children must regularly attend groups, clubs or activities outside the home in order to learn how to socialise.

Families are often asked questions such as:

"How does your child socialise?"

or:

"How often does your child go out?"

These questions are frequently based upon assumptions that:

- Social development only occurs through frequent peer interaction
- School represents the ideal model of socialisation
- Children who spend significant time at home are automatically isolated

These assumptions do not reflect the diversity of children's personalities, needs or circumstances. Social development is highly individual, and not all children are socially



outgoing, emotionally ready for group environments or physically able to participate in regular outside activities.

Socialisation Is Not Simply "Being Around Other Children"

Social development involves learning how to:

- Communicate
- Form relationships
- Understand boundaries
- Manage conflict
- Develop empathy
- Participate in society
- Interact with people appropriately

These skills may develop through many different forms of interaction, including:

- Family relationships
- Hobbies
- Online communities
- One-to-one friendships
- Community activities
- Volunteering
- Sports
- Gaming
- Educational groups
- Religious communities
- Everyday life experiences

Socialisation is therefore broader than simply spending time in large peer groups.

Not All Children Want Frequent Social Interaction

Personality Differences

Children vary significantly in temperament and social preference.

Some children are:

- Highly sociable



- Confident in groups
- Energised by social interaction

Others may naturally prefer:

- Quiet environments
- Small groups
- One-to-one friendships
- Independent hobbies
- Spending significant time alone

Introversion is not a problem requiring correction.

A child who enjoys reading, art, gaming, coding, music or creative projects at home may still have entirely healthy emotional and social development.

Not All Children Can Frequently Go Out

SEND and Neurodiversity

Some children find outside environments difficult or overwhelming due to:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Sensory processing difficulties
- PDA
- Anxiety disorders
- Trauma
- Chronic fatigue
- Chronic illness
- Physical disability
- Mental health difficulties

For these children, regular attendance at large group activities may be:

- Exhausting
- Distressing
- Dysregulating
- Simply not currently manageable

Many neurodivergent children spend considerable energy masking difficulties in social situations.



This can lead to:

- Exhaustion
- Shutdowns
- Meltdowns
- Increased anxiety
- Avoidance of further interaction

A child may therefore require significant downtime following social activity or may carefully limit the amount of interaction they can comfortably manage.

Professionals should understand that reduced social participation may sometimes represent healthy self-regulation rather than unhealthy isolation. A child who struggles to leave the home is not automatically socially neglected.

Children Recovering From Trauma

Some children require significant periods of recovery following:

- Bullying
- School trauma
- Emotionally based school avoidance
- Chronic anxiety
- Sensory overload
- Prolonged distress in school environments

Immediately expecting these children to attend numerous activities or social groups may be inappropriate and counterproductive.

In some cases, the priority may initially be:

- Emotional regulation
- Rebuilding trust
- Improving mental health
- Restoring sleep patterns
- Reducing anxiety

Social confidence may return gradually over time.



Online Friendships and Communities

Modern social interaction increasingly occurs online.

Children may develop meaningful friendships and shared interests through:

- Gaming communities
- Online educational groups
- Creative collaborations
- Forums
- Coding projects
- Shared-interest communities
- Virtual clubs

While online interaction may not replace all in-person contact, it can provide valuable social opportunities, particularly for:

- Disabled children
- Neurodivergent children
- Rural families
- Children with niche interests

Quality vs Quantity of Social Interaction

More Activities Does Not Necessarily Mean Better Social Development

A child attending multiple clubs each week is not automatically happier or better socially developed than a child with fewer but more meaningful relationships.

The quality of interactions matters.

A child may have:

- A small number of close friendships
- Positive family relationships
- Meaningful online communities
- Occasional carefully chosen activities

while still being socially healthy and emotionally secure.



Distinguishing Between Isolation and Individual Need

Questions To Consider

When considering social development, you should ask:

- Is the child emotionally secure and supported?
- Are there opportunities for interaction appropriate to the child's needs?
- Does the child have meaningful relationships?
- Are there identifiable barriers affecting participation?
- Is the child choosing lower levels of social interaction, or are they being prevented from interacting?
- Have SEND, anxiety or trauma been considered?

If an officer has initial concerns about suitability, they should first consider whether those concerns arise from a lack of explanation rather than a lack of educational provision. Parents often provide factual information about what they do without explaining the reasoning behind their decisions, particularly when those decisions are already well understood within the family. Seeking clarification may be more appropriate than assuming that an educational deficiency exists.

Being explicit in gaining that clarification is important. For example asking what groups a child attends will not result in a parent explaining why groups are not suitable to the child.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Autistic Child Who Rarely Leaves Home

Background

An autistic child experiences severe sensory overload in busy environments and currently leaves the house only for short periods. The child spends most of their time at home engaging in reading, gaming, online communities and one-to-one interaction with close family members.

Approach that may unintentionally undermine what is best for the child

An officer assumes the child is socially isolated and expresses concern solely because the child does not attend regular group activities.



Good Practice

The officer recognises the child's sensory difficulties and understands that forcing regular outside participation may be harmful rather than beneficial. The focus remains on the child's wellbeing, relationships and individual needs. Understanding that daily interaction with online friends is building respectful and fun relationships which far better suits the child than busy in person groups.

Case Study 2: Recovery From School Anxiety

Background

A child who experienced severe school anxiety has recently begun home education and currently avoids most social situations outside the family home.

Approach that may unintentionally cause distrust

The officer treats the child's reduced outside activity as evidence that home education is causing isolation.

Good Practice

The officer recognises that recovery from school-related trauma and anxiety may take time and understands that gradual re-engagement with the outside world may be more appropriate than immediate social pressure. Signposting to museum events or small craft gatherings could be helpful for when the child is ready to venture out. Providing the parents with links to support services for the child and the parent would be valuable.

Case Study 3: The Introverted Child

Background

A home educated teenager prefers solitary hobbies including coding, music production and creative writing. They maintain a small number of close friendships online and occasionally meet friends in person.

Approach that may unintentionally undermine what is right for the child

An officer expresses concern because the child is not attending frequent social groups.



Good Practice

The officer recognises that introversion is a normal personality trait and focuses on the quality of the child's relationships and wellbeing rather than the quantity of organised activities.

Educational Freedom



Module 9: SEND and Home Education

Learning Objectives

- Understand the relationship between SEND and home education
- Recognise why many families choose home education
- Understand EHCP responsibilities and processes
- Recognise communication and sensory barriers
- Apply reasonable adjustments
- Support positive communication with neurodivergent families

SEND and Home Education

A significant proportion of home educated children have identified or suspected Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The 2026 EHE stats FOI, shows around 20%⁸ of known home educated children have identified SEND. In contrast, the ongoing survey⁹ of home educating families conducted by Educational Freedom found that approximately 60% reported having a child with SEND.

The true figure is likely to lie somewhere between these two estimates. Many Local Authorities only record SEND where an EHCP is in place or where information has been voluntarily shared by families. Equally, families of children with SEND may be more likely to seek support from organisations such as Educational Freedom and therefore be overrepresented within the survey data.

Many families report that difficulties accessing suitable support within school contributed to their decision to home educate.

For some families, home education represents not a rejection of education, but an attempt to provide an education better suited to their child's needs.

For an increasing number of families, home education is a necessity to keep their child safe, or even alive. The choice was not between school and home education. The choice was between home education and no education at all.

Many parents describe the same pattern: escalating difficulties, repeated requests for support, long waiting lists, and a gradual breakdown of the relationship with school. Eventually, attendance collapses. The child is no longer going in. The family is told by school that

⁸ EHE 2026 Data gathered from Freedom Of Information Requests.

⁹ The survey data will be published late 2026 and updated here.



“something needs to be done”. And having exhausted all other options, the only option left is deregistration.

At that point, home education becomes a label applied after the fact. Not a plan, not a vision – simply a status assigned to a family who has fallen through the gaps.

Read more [about how home education is sometimes a necessity and the only option left](#).

Understanding Family Experiences

Many SEND families have experienced:

- Long assessment delays
- Disputes regarding support
- School exclusions
- Attendance difficulties
- Anxiety
- Bullying
- Unmet needs

These experiences can influence how families approach home education and how they engage with professionals.

When you are aware of upsetting circumstances behind the decision to home educate, it would be considerate and productive to approach with support as the primary goal.

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

When a parent informs the Local Authority that they have chosen to electively home educate a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the EHCP does not cease and the child does not leave the SEND system. The Local Authority remains responsible for maintaining the EHCP conducting annual reviews, keeping the child's special educational needs and any provision under review, deciding in partnership with the family whether the EHCP continues to be necessary, and considering what special educational provision it may provide to support the family.

Elective home education (EHE) is simply a parental choice about how a child is educated; it does not bring the EHCP to an end.

Where parents have made suitable alternative arrangements for the child's education, section 42(5) of the Children and Families Act 2014 disapplies the Local Authority's duty to secure the special educational provision specified in Section F for so long as those arrangements remain



suitable. Local authorities should consider suitability of provision based on the individual child and should not assume that education provision is unsuitable simply because it differs from school-based provision.

Local authorities should also recognise that elective home education does not remove the child's entitlement to consideration for support. While the authority may not be under a duty to arrange the educational provision specified in Section F where parents are making suitable alternative arrangements, it retains discretion to provide special educational provision where appropriate. Local authorities should consider requests on their individual merits and avoid blanket policies that automatically refuse support to all home-educated children with EHCPs. Blanket policies that automatically refuse support to all home-educated children with EHCPs are inconsistent with the requirement to exercise discretion lawfully.

The SEND Code of Practice, particularly paragraphs 10.30–10.38, emphasises that Local Authorities should work in partnership with parents of children and young people with SEND who are electively home educated, supporting them to help ensure that their special educational needs are met. Consistent with that approach, Local Authorities may provide support where appropriate, including access to specialist advice, therapy services, equipment, training, assessments or other assistance. A child's home education should not, of itself, be treated as a reason to refuse consideration of support. Decisions should instead be based on the individual child's circumstances, identified needs, and the Local Authority's statutory duties and powers.

Importantly, a parent's decision to electively home educate affects only the arrangements for the child's education. It does not amount to opting out of health services, social care services, SEND assessments, annual reviews, or other statutory processes. Health provision in Section G and social care provision in Sections H1 and H2 remain subject to the relevant statutory duties and eligibility criteria. Local Authority staff should therefore regard elective home education as a change in how education is delivered, rather than as a withdrawal from the wider statutory framework that supports children and young people with SEND.

You should understand:

- The distinction between elective home education, EOTIS, education arranged by the Local Authority because attendance at school would be inappropriate (section 61 CFA 2014) and s19 provision education arranged by the Local Authority because a child cannot attend school for reasons such as illness, exclusion or otherwise.
- The continuing statutory duties relating to EHCPs.
- Having an EHCP does not alter the deregistration process from a mainstream school.
- Consent to remove the child's name from special school should not be unnecessarily delayed.
- An EHCP review does not need to take place before deregistration from mainstream or special school.



- Unnecessary delays in special school deregistration decisions can have a significant detrimental impact on both the child and family, particularly where the child is no longer attending, or no longer considered appropriate or is contributing to distress..
- Parents who electively home educate are expected to make educational provision that is suitable for their child and capable of meeting the special educational needs identified in Section B of the EHCP.

Applying for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA)

Home educated children have the same rights as children attending school to request an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment.

Parents, young people over compulsory school age, or a person acting on behalf of a school or post 16 educational institute may request an assessment. Where it is believed that the child may have special educational needs that may require provision to be made through an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The fact that a child is home educated does not prevent an assessment from taking place and must not be treated as a reason to refuse to assess.

Section 36(8) of the Children and Families Act 2014 states:

"The Local Authority must secure an EHC needs assessment for the child or young person if, after having regard to any views expressed and evidence submitted under subsection (7), the authority is of the opinion that—

(a) the child or young person has or may have special educational needs, and

(b) it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person in accordance with an EHC plan."

The legal test is therefore whether the child *has or may have* special educational needs and whether it *may be necessary* for provision to be made through an EHCP. School attendance is not part of this test.

Similarly, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice makes clear:

"The child's parent, a young person over the age of 16 but under the age of 25, and a person acting on behalf of a school or post-16 institution (this should ideally be with the knowledge and agreement of the parent or young person where possible) have a specific right to ask a Local Authority to conduct an EHC needs assessment." (SEND Code of Practice, paragraph 9.8)



A request for assessment should therefore be considered on its own merit regardless of whether the child attends school, is home educated, or has never attended school.

An Educational Psychologist assessment, as part of the EHCNA process, applies to all children, and can be carried out in a clinic, at the Local Authority offices, in the home (if child and parent consent), observations can take place at home ed groups (with appropriate consent). Regardless of how a child receives their education, the same relevant professional's information and advice in line with regulation 6 SEND Regulations 2014 must be sought. It just may require some out of the box thinking and parent partnership working to ensure the required information is captured.

EHCP Reviews and Home Education

When a home educated child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), it is important to remember that the purpose of the annual review is to consider whether the EHCP continues to accurately reflect the child's special educational needs, the outcomes sought, and the provision required to meet those needs. The review should also consider whether the EHCP remains necessary.

The annual review should remain focused on the child's special educational needs and the content of the EHCP. It should not be used as a substitute for elective home education enquiries or as a mechanism for determining the suitability of the education being provided.

The purpose of the EHCP annual review is not to determine whether a parent is providing a suitable education under section 7 of the Education Act 1996. Those are separate statutory considerations governed by different legal duties and should not be conflated.

As is the case for all EHCP annual reviews the parent / guardian must be invited to the annual review meeting. It is up to the parent if they attend. Many home educated families prefer a "paper meeting" normally in the format of exchanging emails, as in the majority of cases it is only the EHCP caseworker and family who would be part of the meeting. This is therefore an efficient way of capturing necessary information for an annual review where minimal or no amendments will be required that review cycle. As with all parents, if the parent would like a personal budget for a specific SEP this can be requested by them as part of the annual review and the Local Authority must consider the request.

At least two weeks before the annual review meeting date all information and reports that are intended to be relied upon as part of the annual review must be circulated to ensure all involved in Annual Review can effectively participate.



The timescales to conclude an annual review are the same regardless of how a child receives their education. It is important in an annual review meeting that a parent's choice to home educate is respected but equally if a parent advises they will no longer be home educating and want any named schools consulted for an educational placement this decision must also be respected and you must carry out the relevant consultations. If a parent raises a specific SEP they would like support with providing, in line with SENDCOP 10-30-10.38 and Local Authorities powers and duties, you should consider if you can provide for it out of the high needs funding block which includes all children with SEN in your area. SEP you would have to commission separately, regardless of if the child is in school, an alternative provision or home educated, would normally be proportionate to support the family with.

Information shared during an annual review is often discussed in the context of the child's SEND, health, wellbeing, family circumstances, or barriers to learning. Families may be more willing to discuss challenges openly when they understand that the purpose of the review is to ensure that their child's needs are accurately identified and appropriately supported. For this reason, **Local Authorities should carefully consider whether it is appropriate for an Elective Home Education officer to attend an annual review, taking into account the purpose of the meeting, the issues to be discussed, and the potential impact on the family's ability to participate openly.**

Care should be taken not to remove information from its SEND context or interpret it, without further evidence, as indicating that the home education itself is unsuitable. For example, discussions about anxiety, executive functioning difficulties, sensory needs, developmental delay, reduced formal learning, or difficulties accessing particular activities may reflect the child's disabilities or special educational needs rather than deficiencies in the educational provision.

Outcomes in Section E should be interpreted in light of the child's special educational needs, rather than the setting in which education is delivered. They should be developed in partnership with parents, and drafted as SMART outcomes (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound).

Where a child is electively home educated, the fact that an outcome was originally developed when the child attended school should not, of itself, disadvantage the child or lead to inappropriate amendments to the EHCP. Instead, Local Authorities should consider whether the outcome remains appropriate and how it can be achieved through the family's chosen educational arrangements.

Section E should describe what the child is expected to achieve, not where or how those outcomes will be delivered. The educational setting or method of delivery belongs within the provision and educational arrangements, not within the outcome itself.

Example: A child may have an outcome relating to developing social communication skills. The outcome should focus on the skill to be achieved, rather than requiring participation in a classroom.



"Within 12 months, when participating in structured group activities, the child will initiate or respond appropriately in at least three reciprocal exchanges on four out of five observed occasions, as evidenced through parent and professional observations."

This outcome **does not require a school**. The outcome could be achieved through opportunities such as:

- Home education groups
- Equine facilitated learning
- Scouts, Guides or Cadets
- Sports clubs
- Youth groups
- Volunteering
- Community activities
- Any other suitable environment

Where concerns about the suitability of the home education arise independently of the EHCP review process, they should be considered through the appropriate elective home education processes rather than through the EHCP annual review meeting itself. Maintaining this distinction helps ensure that families can engage honestly in reviews without concern that information shared to support an accurate assessment of their child's needs and to request relevant support with SEP will later be relied upon for a different statutory purpose.

Maintaining a clear distinction between the EHCP review process and elective home education enquiries promotes more effective information sharing, better assessments of children's needs, and stronger, more constructive relationships between Local Authorities and families.

Flexibility and Suitability

Children with SEND may require highly individualised provision.

Suitable education may include:

- Informal study
- Flexible routines
- Therapeutic activities
- Practical learning
- Interest-led learning
- Ability suitable rather than age suitable learning

You should consider the child's needs when considering the provision.



Understanding Neurodivergent Learning Styles

Neurodivergent children may learn in many different ways.

This includes children who are:

- Autistic
- ADHD
- Dyslexic
- Dyspraxic
- Tourette's
- PDA profile children. ([learn more about PDA](#))

Some neurodivergent children learn most effectively through:

- Interest-based learning
- Practical activities
- Repetition
- Deep focus on specialist interests
- Flexible learning patterns
- Predictable routine

For example, monotropism may result in a child developing extremely deep knowledge and understanding in a smaller number of areas at a time. This focused learning can still support the development of wider educational skills including literacy, research, communication and problem solving.

Children experiencing autistic burnout, chronic anxiety or fatigue may temporarily have reduced capacity or concentration and may require periods focused on recovery, regulation and wellbeing.

Executive dysfunction may affect:

- Organisation
- Task initiation
- Transitions between activities
- Written output
- Consistency

Some children may also display:

- Asynchronous development
- Uneven learning profiles
- Demand avoidance



For example, a child may demonstrate advanced understanding in some areas while struggling significantly in others, particularly where anxiety, sensory needs or communication differences are present.

Sensory regulation may also form an important part of the child's educational provision. Movement breaks, quiet environments, reduced demands or flexible routines may be necessary for the child to engage successfully with learning.

You should therefore consider whether the educational approach is appropriate for the individual child and their needs.

Understanding Routine

Many neurodivergent children require routine, sometimes strict schedules. These children can often feel confused and off balance for a while after deregistration.

It takes time to find a new balance to their routine.

Some families initially feel that replicating a school day is what the child needs, it is after all what the child knows and understands. This routine may well change in time and it may come to be that the routine the child needs is less rigid. Knowing the pattern of the day can often be enough, such as wake up, get dressed, have breakfast, go to a group, lunch, learning at home, tea, playing, bed.

It is reasonable to see lots of trial and error with routine, styles and resources over an extended period of time whilst the family figures out what does and doesn't work. This does not mean the education is unsuitable, it means to ensure long term suitability there has to be an adjustment period.

Communication Differences

Some children and parents may:

- Prefer written communication
- Require additional processing time
- Find telephone communication difficult.
- Experience anxiety during meetings
- Find home visits upsetting and even traumatic, more so if they are unannounced



It is important to recognise that communication preferences are not indicators of non-cooperation or educational suitability.

Disabled Parents

Children of a disabled parent should not automatically be assumed to be acting as unpaid carers or missing out on education.

For many families, home education provides significantly greater flexibility, allowing family life and education to work together more positively. The removal of pressures associated with school runs and rigid routines may result in:

- Calmer home environments
- Stronger parent-child relationships
- Flexibility

Home education may also allow children to develop practical life skills, family relationships and independence alongside their education.

Reasonable Adjustments

It is beneficial to consider reasonable adjustments when engaging with SEND families.

Examples include:

- Written communication
- Flexible deadlines
- Accessible forms
- Advance notice of meetings
- Clear agendas
- Alternative methods of providing information
- Clear, non ambiguous communication

These adjustments can substantially improve communication and the outcomes.

Positive Engagement

Families are more likely to engage when they feel understood.



Good practice includes:

- Listening carefully
- Asking open questions
- Avoiding assumptions
- Recognising expertise developed by parents

Parents often possess detailed knowledge of their child's needs and learning style.



Module 10: Supporting Families

Learning Objectives

- Understand the role that support plays in positive relationships with home educating families
- Recognise the importance of clear, accessible and proportionate communication
- Understand how communication difficulties can be mistaken for educational concerns
- Understand when support and clarification may be more appropriate than escalation
- Recognise the importance of signposting and independent support services
- Understand the importance of remaining neutral during parental disputes

A supportive Local Authority is going to have a positive impact on home educators, their education experience and the child's outcomes.

Practical Support Local Authorities Could Include In Their Literature/Website

- Details about all styles of home education and the role of deschooling
 - Resource ideas that go beyond curriculum based ideas
 - Local home education groups
 - National home education support services
 - Local events pages
 - Information about Child Benefit and Universal Credit, how home education does/doesn't affect claims and when to notify them. [More information about benefits, the rules and process.](#)
 - School Nurse information
 - Mental health support.
 - Helplines/websites about bullying and dealing with the after effects
 - Details of local referral methods for autism etc.
 - Local support schemes.
 - Examination information.
 - Community organisations.
 - Charity grants.
 - Free school meals/holiday clubs that are still accessible to home educators.
-



Early Support Before Escalation

Whenever appropriate, you should seek to resolve concerns through support before considering formal action. (Please note: This is not referring to cases where there are genuine safeguarding concerns that must be referred to children's social services)

Supportive approaches may include:

- Explaining concerns clearly
- Offering examples of helpful information
- Avoiding formal education language
- Extending response deadlines
- Providing alternative communication methods
- Signposting to local services
- Checking whether practical barriers exist
- Signposting to free home education support services

Escalation should not be the default response.

Families are more likely to discuss things openly when communication is supportive, proportionate and clearly explained

What Support Could Look Like

Ensuring that communication is clear, accessible and focused on understanding the education being provided is a good starting point.

Where information appears incomplete or raises concerns, you should consider whether the concern arises from a lack of information rather than a lack of education. Many home educating parents are not education professionals and may struggle to explain their provision in terms that a Local Authority would immediately recognise. As discussed previously, parents are often confident that the education they provide is suitable for their child. They may therefore assume that an officer will automatically understand information that, to them, seems obvious

Use Clear and Accessible Language

Many home educating families do not use educational terminology. Some may have literacy difficulties, learning difficulties, English as an additional language, communication differences, or simply be unfamiliar with educational language.

Questions framed using formal education based terminology may unintentionally create confusion.



[Appendix 3](#) contains further information and examples of how you can support families to understand the information you require.

Example: A query regarding full-time education

A parent explains that their child completes approximately one hour of formal learning each day.

Viewed in isolation, this information may raise concerns about whether the education is full-time.

Less helpful:

- We have concerns about the suitability of the education your child receives. Please provide evidence that a full-time education is taking place.

Potentially more helpful:

- Thank you for the information you shared with us about your child's education. We would like some more information so we can better understand how the education is full-time and suitable. What kinds of activities, interests, projects, outings, conversations or resources form part of your child's learning? How does learning fit into your child's daily life?

These alternative questions may provide a clearer understanding of the child's education without requiring parents to translate their experience into school or formal based language.

Further discussion reveals that the child has significant anxiety and PDA characteristics. Formal learning is intentionally limited because it is not an effective way for that child to learn. The parent then explains that the child also spends substantial time reading independently, pursuing special interests, visiting museums, engaging in practical life skills, researching topics online, attending community activities and participating in discussions with family members.

The concern arose not because education was absent, but because the parent had only described the formal elements and had not understood that the wider learning opportunities were also relevant.

The follow-up enquiry, worded carefully and focused on understanding the provision, is likely to provide the information required without the need for escalation

Example: Educational Suitability

A parent submits a brief report including:

"My child learns through their interests and does not follow a curriculum."



On its own, this statement may provide insufficient information for the Local Authority to consider suitability.

Less helpful:

- The information you have provided has not satisfied our legal duty. Without further evidence we expect you to register your child at school.

Or

- Please provide details of the timetable you use, photos of work, and information about the workbooks/websites used.

Potentially more helpful:

- It would be helpful to hear some of the topics your child has been learning about lately. This could include any reading, research, conversations, activities or outings.
- What interests is the child currently pursuing?
- How does the child access information and resources?
- How does the provision take account of your child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs? Explaining why the education is suitable for your individual child is particularly helpful.

Parents are often able to provide the information required once they understand what is being asked and why.

Understanding Different Communication Styles

Some parents provide extensive information. Others provide only short answers. Neither approach should automatically be interpreted as indicating the quality of the education being provided.

A lengthy report may still fail to explain how the education is suitable for the child. Equally, a short one-page response may contain all the information needed to understand the provision

Where a response appears limited in content or specifics, you should consider whether:

- The parent has misunderstood the question or required information.
- The parent is anxious about sharing information.
- The parent has communication difficulties.
- The parent believes the Local Authority is seeking information that is not relevant.
- The parent has answered the question literally without adding contextual information.

A supportive follow-up enquiry may often resolve these issues more effectively than escalation.



The aim should be to understand the education being provided, rather than how a parent chooses to describe it or the terminology they use.

Signposting To Resources

Where you identify a potential gap in provision, it is important to first consider whether the information provided adequately reflects the education taking place. A perceived gap may sometimes arise because a parent has not fully explained their approach, rather than because learning is absent.

Where further support or signposting is considered appropriate, suggestions should be proportionate, flexible and respectful of the family's educational approach..

For example, if concerns are raised about numeracy, it may not be appropriate to recommend workbooks, online maths programmes or formal lessons where a family has clearly explained that they follow an informal or autonomous approach. Instead, you could suggest how mathematical skills can be developed through a wide variety of activities, including games, budgeting, cooking, practical projects, hobbies, travel and everyday life experiences.

Any suggestions should be offered as options rather than requirements, taking into account the child's age, ability, aptitude, special educational needs and the educational approach chosen by the family.

Signposting for Additional Support

Occasionally, despite follow-up questions and attempts to clarify concerns, a family may still struggle to provide the information the Local Authority requires. This does not necessarily indicate that the education is unsuitable. In some cases, the parent may not fully understand what information is being requested, may be unfamiliar with educational terminology, or may be struggling to explain their educational approach in a way that addresses the Local Authority's concerns.

Educational Freedom's experience suggests that many requests for further information and potential escalations arise from communication difficulties rather than concerns about the education itself. A common factor is the use of formal education based language. Parents may be asked to explain learning in terms of lessons, timetables, curriculum coverage or formal instruction, while their child's education may not be organised in that way. As a result, the parent may answer the question they believe has been asked, while the Local Authority may still feel important information is missing.

Where appropriate, you should consider signposting families to free independent home education support organisations. Free resources such as a [provision and resources report](#)



[writing guide](#), and one-to-one support helps parents understand what information may be relevant to their circumstances and how to explain their provision more clearly. This includes guidance on describing full-time education, demonstrating suitability, explaining educational approaches, and communicating how provision meets a child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs.

Educational Freedom does not write reports on behalf of families or provide templates to copy. Instead, support focuses on helping parents explain their own provision in their own words. This may involve asking additional questions, identifying areas where further detail would be helpful, or helping parents understand the concerns that the Local Authority is seeking to address.

In many cases, once this communication gap has been addressed, families are able to provide all of the information required, enabling the Local Authority to reach an informed decision without the need for further escalation.

Disagreements Between Parents

Where parents disagree about home education, you should remain neutral and avoid becoming drawn into parental disputes.

The existence of disagreement between parents does not automatically indicate safeguarding concerns or unsuitable education. You should avoid accepting one parent's views, frustrations, or allegations uncritically without considering the wider context and available evidence.

You should remain mindful that disputes relating to:

- School attendance
- Educational choice
- Contact arrangements
- Family court proceedings
- Parental relationships

may significantly influence the information being presented.

Where both parents hold parental responsibility, disagreements about education are generally matters for the parents themselves or, where necessary, the family courts to resolve.

However, you can still play a constructive and supportive role by:

- Providing both parents with clear and accurate information about home education law and guidance
- Explaining that a deregistration request from a single parent with parental responsibility is sufficient, and that removal from roll should take place promptly upon receipt of a deregistration letter



- Explaining the Local Authority's role and limitations
- Remaining calm and impartial in communication
- Signposting families to appropriate support services where needed
- Focusing discussions on the child's needs, wellbeing, and educational provision rather than the conflict itself

Local authorities should avoid:

- Appearing to "take sides"
- Using EHE processes to influence parental disputes
- Treating disagreement itself as evidence of unsuitable education

The focus should remain on:

- The child's welfare
 - Whether suitable education appears to be taking place
 - Whether any evidence-based safeguarding concerns exist
-



Module 11: Working With Community Groups

Learning Objectives

- Understand the role community groups and organisations play in home education
 - Recognise the value of peer support for both children and parents
 - Understand why signposting to support networks matters
 - Recognise how positive engagement with community groups can improve communication
-

The Value of Home Education Communities

Home education communities, groups, organisations, and informal networks play an important role in supporting families throughout their home education journey.

For many families, especially those new to home education, finding other home educators can be life changing. A family who previously felt isolated may suddenly discover a thriving and supportive community around them (in person and/or online). This often brings reassurance, confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging.

Community groups may provide:

- Peer support
- Educational opportunities
- Exam guidance
- Social activities
- Mentoring
- Emotional support
- SEND and neurodiversity support
- Information about local activities and resources
- Opportunities for children to build friendships and wider community connections

Many home educating families report initially feeling alone or uncertain. Some families discover organisations such as Educational Freedom purely by accident through an internet search or social media. After connecting with other home educating families, many describe a significant improvement in confidence and wellbeing, realising that home education is far more common and established than they first believed.

Local authorities should recognise these groups as an important part of the wider home education community and support network. Families often seek advice and reassurance from



those with lived experience of home education, and community groups can provide practical and emotional support that complements, rather than replaces, the Local Authority's role.

The Importance of Signposting

Signposting families to support groups, organisations, exam centres, online communities, and local activities is one of the simplest and most positive actions an EHE team can take.

Families consistently praise Local Authorities that openly share information about:

- Local home education groups
- National organisations
- Educational resources
- Exam information
- SEND support services
- Social opportunities and community activities

When signposting families, Local Authorities should consider providing a range of support options rather than relying on a single organisation or service.

Not all families can afford paid support services, and not all organisations support every style of home education equally. Providing a mixture of local groups, national organisations, informal communities, and free resources helps ensure families can access support that is suitable for their individual approach, circumstances, and educational philosophy.

Publicly available, balanced and varied signposting demonstrates openness, inclusivity, and an understanding of the diversity within the home education community. It helps build a positive relationship between families and the Local Authority.

Many home educators view a willingness to share information positively, as it demonstrates that the authority is genuinely interested in supporting families to access the wider home education community.

By contrast, some families become cautious when authorities do not signpost, discourage online community interaction, or avoid acknowledging established home education organisations. This can unintentionally support fears that families may already hold about engaging with the Local Authority.



Signposting Following Enquiries

- Where a Local Authority has made enquiries and remains concerned that a parent may not fully understand home education or the information required, signposting to reputable home education organisations and support groups can often be a constructive and proportionate step before matters escalate further.
- Many families are simply inexperienced, overwhelmed, isolated, or unaware of the support and information available to them. Access to experienced organisations, peer support, practical guidance, and community networks can significantly improve a family's confidence and understanding.
- Signposting demonstrates that the Local Authority is focused on helping families access support and information, rather than solely focusing on enforcement. It also shows openness and transparency.
- In some cases, families who initially struggled to explain their provision may make significant progress after connecting with wider home education communities and support organisations.

Community Engagement Benefits Everyone

A positive relationship between Local Authorities and the wider home education community can benefit everyone involved.

Good communication between EHE teams and community organisations can lead to:

- Better understanding between families and professionals
- Improved communication
- Better signposting and support for families
- Earlier access to help where needed
- Improved policies and procedures
- Positive relationships
- Better outcomes for children and young people

Many Local Authorities already work constructively with home education groups and find that this improves relationships significantly.

Home educators often have valuable lived experience and practical insight into how policies work in reality. Inviting feedback from home educating families and organisations can help authorities better understand the impact of their procedures and communications.

Examples of positive engagement may include:

- Inviting feedback on letters and website content
- Consulting with home educators during policy reviews



- Attending local home education events when invited
 - Listening to concerns raised by families respectfully
 - Working collaboratively to improve communication and understanding
-

Educational Freedom



Module 12: Website and Resource Design

Learning Objectives

- Understand how website design affects relationships
- Recognise the importance of plain English communication
- Design accessible and supportive resources
- Provide legally accurate information
- Avoid unnecessarily adversarial or school type language
- Understand how website content can influence future communication with families
- Recognise common barriers families experience when seeking information about home education

Why Website Design Matters

For many families, the Local Authority home education webpage is their first interaction with the home education team. This may occur before deregistration, immediately after leaving school, or during a period of significant stress and uncertainty.

Families often arrive looking for practical information. They may want to know:

- How to deregister
- Whether they need permission
- What home education looks like
- Do they need to follow the curriculum
- How many hours learning should happen
- What support is available
- What the Local Authority's role is
- What information they may be asked to provide

The quality of the information provided can have a significant impact on future engagement. A website that is clear, accurate and supportive can help families feel informed and confident.

A website that is difficult to navigate, heavily focused on enforcement, filled with unexplained legal terminology, or even lacking much information at all, can create anxiety and mistrust before any direct communication has taken place.

Many home educating families report that after reading their Local Authority's website they still do not understand the questions they wanted answers for.

In some cases, families leave with a mistaken belief that home visits, monitoring meetings or following a curriculum are legal requirements when they are not. Or that they are home



schooling rather than home educating, thus blurring the lines of responsibility. Correct terminology is vital for clarity, this [gov.uk article](https://www.gov.uk/government/articles/2018/04/11/what-is-home-education) explains the differences.

A well-designed website should reduce confusion rather than create it.

Plain English Drafting

Local Authority websites should be written for ordinary parents, not legal professionals.

Many families accessing the website will be:

- Newly home educating
- Experiencing stress or uncertainty
- Supporting children with SEND
- Unfamiliar with educational terminology
- Reading information on a mobile device
- Using English as an additional language

Information should therefore be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Accessible
- Easy to navigate
- Supportive in tone
- Located in one clearly labelled section

Avoid lengthy paragraphs of legal terminology without explanation.

Where legislation, duties or powers are referenced, they should be accompanied by a plain English explanation of what this means in practice.

For example:

Less helpful:

"The Local Authority has a duty under Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to identify children not receiving suitable education."

More helpful:

"The Local Authority has a legal duty to identify children who may not be receiving a suitable education and, where necessary, make enquiries to understand the education being provided. To do this we will email you to ask about the home education provision."



The legal reference may still be included, but it should not replace an explanation.

Avoiding Adversarial Language

The tone of a website is as important as the information it contains.

Many Local Authority websites contain extensive references to:

- School Attendance Orders
- Formal notices
- Monitoring and assessing
- Investigations
- Enforcement powers

Whilst this information may sometimes be legally accurate, presenting it without context can create unnecessary anxiety.

Families should understand that formal powers exist, but they should also understand:

- Why those powers exist
- When they may be used
- That most interactions never reach that stage
- That the Local Authority's role includes support as well as statutory duties

A website should not read as though every family is expected to become subject to enforcement action.

Avoiding School-Centred Assumptions

Website content should recognise that home education can look very different from school and that formal educational language is not always appropriate.

Families should not be left with the impression that home education requires:

- A timetable
- A curriculum
- School hours (or a suggestion of 21-24 hours)
- Formal lessons
- Workbooks
- Subject-by-subject teaching
- Regular testing



It is equally important that families leave with a positive understanding of what home education can be, rather than simply a list of what it does not have to involve. Information should reflect the wide variety of educational approaches and reassure families that suitable education can take many different forms.

Where examples are provided, they should reflect a variety of educational approaches including structured, semi-structured, child-led and autonomous learning.

The website should make clear that suitability is considered according to the individual child.

Accessibility and User Experience

Families should be able to find key information quickly.

Good practice may include:

- Clear headings
- Logical navigation
- Frequently asked questions
- Downloadable resources
- Mobile-friendly design
- Accessible formatting
- Plain language summaries

Important and helpful information should not be hidden within lengthy policy documents.

Parents should not need specialist legal knowledge to understand their options.

Every Website Should Answer

A Local Authority home education webpage should clearly answer:

- What is home education?
- How is home education different from school?
- What educational approaches and styles exist?
- How do I deregister my child?
- What is the process for special school deregistration?
- What are my legal responsibilities?
- What a full-time education can look like.
- What suitable to age, ability, aptitude and SEN can mean.
- What are the Local Authority's duties?
- What happens after deregistration?



- What information may the Local Authority seek?
- What support is available?
- What support exists for children with SEND?
- How and when will an EHCP review happen?
- How do examinations work for home educated children?
- Where can I find local groups and support networks?
- What financial assistance may be available?
- Where can I obtain independent advice?

The website should also explain in detail (not just state):

- That home education does not need to replicate school
- That educational approaches may change over time
- That newly home educating families often need time to adjust
- That home education and home schooling are not the same thing
- That children can learn in many different ways

Measuring Success

A successful home education webpage should leave families feeling:

- Better informed
- Less anxious
- Clear about their rights and responsibilities
- More confident in understanding the Local Authority's role
- More likely to communicate constructively if contacted

The aim is not simply to provide information. The aim is to ensure families can understand it.



Module 13: Informal Enquiries

Learning Objectives

- Understand the purpose of informal enquiries
 - Recognise the importance of proportionality
 - Understand how communication methods influence relationships
 - Recognise common barriers that may affect responses
 - Understand the limitations of evidence requests
 - Build confidence through constructive communication
-

The Purpose of Informal Enquiries

Informal enquiries provide an opportunity for Local Authorities to gain an understanding of a child's education and to identify any situations where further support or intervention may genuinely be required.

They are most effective when approached as a conversation aimed at understanding the child's educational provision and individual circumstances, rather than as an inspection or evidence gathering exercise.

Enquiries that focus on understanding the child, their needs and how their education is being provided are more likely to result in open communication, constructive relationships and a clearer picture of the education taking place.

Informal Enquiries Are Not Automatically Annual

Local authorities do not have a legal duty to carry out annual monitoring of all home educated children, and parents are not under a legal duty to participate in routine annual assessments.

Informal enquiries should be proportionate and based on the individual circumstances of the child and family. In many cases, where a family has previously provided suitable information and the education is seen as suitable, repeated annual enquiries requesting similar information may be unnecessary and can damage otherwise positive relationships.

Where there are no specific concerns, communication should remain proportionate, respectful, and mindful that families may reasonably question repeated requests for information that has already been satisfactorily provided in previous years.



What Should An Informal Enquiry Involve?

An informal enquiry should be simple, clear, proportionate, and focused on ensuring the child is not missing from education.

In most cases, this can be achieved through a polite letter or email which:

- Explains the purpose of the enquiry
- Uses clear and accessible language
- Asks only for relevant information
- Recognises that home education may look very different from school
- Makes it clear that families may respond in the format most comfortable for them

A reasonable enquiry will usually seek a general understanding of:

- How the child learns
 - The types of opportunities and experiences available to them
 - How literacy and numeracy are developing
 - How the educational approach suits the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational needs
 - How learning has progressed over time
-

Home Visits and Informal Enquiries

A home visit is not usually the most proportionate or effective way to begin an informal enquiry.

Many families feel uncomfortable inviting professionals into their home, particularly when there is no safeguarding concern or legal requirement to do so. Some families may also have disabilities, neurodivergence, anxiety, trauma, cultural considerations, or previous negative experiences with professionals which make home visits particularly stressful.

In many cases, a well-worded written enquiry provides clearer and more useful information than a brief visit. Written communication also gives families time to explain educational approaches that may be difficult to describe during what may feel like a pressured conversation.

You should also recognise that the quality of education cannot be reliably understood from a short visit to a family home. Home education frequently takes place within everyday life and wider community experiences rather than through visible formal learning activities occurring at a specific moment.



Where families choose to meet with the Local Authority, this should remain voluntary and flexible. Some families may prefer:

- Written communication
- Phone or video conversations
- Meetings in neutral locations
- Other forms of engagement

A family choosing not to have a home visit or meeting should not automatically be viewed as evidence of unsuitable education or lack of cooperation.

Forms and Communication

Many Local Authorities include a form alongside their enquiry letter or email. Forms can help some families structure a response, particularly those who are new to home education or unsure what information may be relevant.

However, forms should remain optional, flexible and should never become a barrier to communication. Parents should always be informed that they may respond in any reasonable format and explain their provision in the way that best reflects their child and educational approach.

Poorly designed forms can unintentionally create difficulties by focusing heavily on school-based concepts such as timetables, subjects, lesson plans, teaching or curriculum coverage. Whilst these questions may be relevant for some families, they may not accurately reflect how learning takes place in others.

Forms should encourage explanation rather than simple data collection and should help you understand:

- How the education is suitable for the individual child
- How learning takes place
- How the child's needs are met
- How the provision reflects the family's educational approach

Forms should include sufficient space for explanation and additional context, and information provided outside the requested format should not be viewed negatively.

A useful question when reviewing any form is:

"Will this help me understand whether the education is suitable for this individual child?"



The best forms help parents explain their provision. The worst unintentionally encourage incomplete responses, leading to avoidable misunderstandings and requests for further information.

Avoiding Confusing Language

Questions focused heavily on:

- Lessons
- Timetables
- Subjects
- Assessments
- Targets
- Monitoring

may confuse families using autonomous, child-led, interest-led, or informal approaches.

Families may incorrectly conclude that they are expected to:

- Follow school routines
- Produce formal or future plans
- Structure learning in a school-like way

This can discourage meaningful responses and may unintentionally pressure families into approaches that are not suitable for the child.

Supporting Families to Respond

Some families genuinely do not know what information may be useful to include, particularly if they are new to home education.

Providing examples can help families feel more confident responding.

Parents may not initially realise that describing activities such as:

- Reading
- Discussions
- Games
- Cooking and baking
- Gardening
- Hobbies



- Personal projects
- Community activities
- Educational outings
- Volunteering
- Creative activities
- Independent research
- Mental health care
- Life skills

can help demonstrate learning and development.

Helping families understand what information may be relevant often leads to clearer and more meaningful responses.

Poorly designed questions can have the opposite effect. Questions that feel impossible to answer within a family's educational approach may leave parents feeling they are "doing home education wrong" and discourage engagement altogether.

Families Where English Is Not the First Language

Some home educating families may speak English as an additional language or may communicate more confidently in another language.

This can affect:

- How families respond to enquiries
- The level of written detail they provide
- How educational approaches are described
- How confidently they use formal communication

You should avoid assuming that brief, unclear, or unusually worded responses indicate poor educational provision or lack of engagement. In some cases, families may fully understand and meet their educational responsibilities while struggling to explain their provision in formal written English.

Educational priorities may also differ between families. Some may place significant value on:

- Maintaining the child's first language
- Bilingual development
- Cultural learning
- Gradual English language acquisition alongside other areas of learning



Children educated bilingually or multilingually may develop literacy, communication, and understanding differently from monolingual children, and this should not automatically be viewed negatively.

Accessible communication, plain English, translation support where appropriate, and flexibility in how families respond can significantly improve communication and understanding.

Accessibility

Communication should be accessible and inclusive.

You should consider:

- Easy-read formats
- Digital accessibility
- Translation requirements
- Alternative communication formats
- Neurodivergent communication needs
- Additional barriers some families may face when responding to formal communication

Accessible communication improves both engagement and understanding.

Communication Methods and Consent

You should consider carefully how you communicate with families. Text messages, WhatsApp, and other informal messaging platforms should generally only be used where the family has clearly agreed to this method of communication.

Some families may:

- Prefer communication by email or letter
- Wish to keep clear written records
- Have accessibility or neurodivergent communication needs
- Feel uncomfortable using informal messaging platforms with professionals

Unexpected messages to personal mobile numbers can feel intrusive, particularly where consent has not been given or where boundaries around communication have not been clearly established.

It should also be recognised that if a parent receives a text message from an unfamiliar number, they have no reliable way of confirming that it genuinely originates from the Local Authority. As a



result, many parents will quite reasonably choose not to engage, assuming it to not be legitimate.

Clear, professional, and agreed methods of communication help maintain trust, transparency, and accurate record keeping.

Online Portals and Record Keeping

Some Local Authorities use online portals for communication, document uploads and responses to enquiries. While these systems can be convenient for some families, they should not become a barrier to engagement.

Families should not be required to use a portal where reasonable alternatives, such as email or post, would be more accessible. Consideration should be given to families with disabilities, limited digital skills, limited internet access, language barriers, or concerns about retaining records of communication.

Particular care should be taken where messages, documents or correspondence are automatically deleted after a period of time. Families should be able to retain copies of communications relating to their child's education, and officers should ensure that important information is not only available through a portal for a limited period.

Good communication should be transparent and easily accessible. Families should be able to review previous correspondence, understand what information has been requested, and retain records of their interactions with the Local Authority. This helps reduce misunderstandings, supports effective communication, and provides a clear record for both parties should questions arise in the future.

Where online portals are used, families should be clearly informed of any time limits on access to messages or documents and encouraged to download or save copies for their records.

Understanding Supported Responses and Templates

Many home educating families seek support when responding to Local Authority enquiries, particularly if they are new to home education, have additional needs, lack confidence in writing formal responses, or feel anxious about communicating with the Local Authority.

It is common for families to:

- Use guidance documents
- Follow report-writing guides
- Ask experienced home educators for advice



- Seek help from home education organisations.

This should not automatically be viewed negatively or interpreted as evidence that the provision itself is unsuitable.

Local Authorities themselves routinely use standardised templates, example wording, and model letters to ensure consistency and clarity. Home educating families may similarly benefit from structured guidance to help them explain their educational approach effectively.

Some organisations and support groups may help parents identify and describe learning that they had previously struggled to put into words. This often involves asking questions about the child's daily life, interests, activities, progress, resources, and opportunities, then helping parents present that information more clearly and confidently.

The use of similar phrasing, formatting, or structure across reports does not necessarily mean the content is inaccurate or not reflective of the individual child. You should focus on the substance of the information provided, whether it demonstrates a suitable education, and whether the response appears genuinely connected to the child's individual circumstances.

There are occasions where families struggle to explain their educational provision in a way that clearly communicates the information a Local Authority needs to understand it. In some cases, this difficulty in communication can contribute to matters progressing as far as a School Attendance Order.

At that stage, some families seek support from home education organisations or support groups. This support often involves spending considerable time asking questions, exploring the family's approach in detail, identifying information that may previously have been assumed or omitted, and helping the family organise that information into a clear and understandable format.

The resulting report may read very differently from previous correspondence, not because the education has changed, but because the family's ability to explain it has improved.

Why Samples of Work Do Not Necessarily Demonstrate Suitable Education

Samples of work can sometimes provide a small snapshot of a child's activities, but they rarely give a complete picture of a child's education. Home education often includes discussions, projects, experiences, reading, practical activities and child-led learning that may produce little or no written work.

Equally, a collection of worksheets or completed tasks does not by itself demonstrate that an education is suitable or appropriate for the individual child.



Where a family's explanation of their educational provision is clear and coherent, requesting additional "proof" may unintentionally create feelings of distrust or scrutiny. If further information is needed, open questions will often provide a fuller understanding than isolated examples of work.

Some may request samples of work in an attempt to help parents demonstrate education more easily. However, this can unintentionally create additional pressure and may shift the focus away from understanding the overall educational provision.

You should also remember that a child's work, creative projects, personal writing, and learning records belong to the child and their family. Parents may reasonably choose not to share private learning materials where they feel this is unnecessary, intrusive, or not reflective of the overall educational provision.

A decision not to provide samples of work should not automatically be interpreted negatively.

Where parents voluntarily choose to share examples of activities or work, these should be viewed as supplementary information rather than a requirement or definitive measure of suitability.

Tutor Reports Do Not Necessarily Demonstrate Suitable Education

Some Local Authorities request tutor reports, screenshots, online progress reports, or printouts from educational websites in order to "support" or "verify" a parent's written report. You should carefully consider whether these requests are genuinely necessary and proportionate.

While external educational resources may form part of a child's provision, they do not in themselves demonstrate the overall suitability of the education being provided by the parent. Equally, a detailed written report from a parent should not automatically be treated as requiring additional evidence in order to be accepted.

Routinely requesting supporting documentation may unintentionally create the impression that parents are expected to prove their account through third-party validation. This can shift the focus away from understanding the overall educational provision.

Where a report is unclear or lacking sufficient detail, it is often more effective to ask further open questions about the child's learning and educational experiences rather than requesting documents, screenshots, or tutor feedback as "proof".

The focus of enquiries should remain on whether suitable education appears to be taking place, not on collecting excessive supporting evidence.



Building Relationships Through Enquiries

Informal enquiries should be approached as an opportunity to build constructive relationships with families.

The tone and design of communication can significantly affect future relationships.

Families who feel respected and understood are more likely to:

- Communicate openly
- Provide meaningful information
- Engage positively with future communication

Families who feel scrutinised, judged, or pressured into formal educational expectations are more likely to disengage



Module 14: Legal Framework, Suitability and Full-Time Education

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of balancing statutory responsibilities with an understanding of the wide array of what home education can look like
 - Recognise that the legal framework provides the basis for decision-making, professional judgement is required to apply it fairly and proportionately to individual children and families
 - Understand the legal test, recognising educational diversity, and avoiding common misconceptions about what suitable full-time education may look like in practice
-

Education Act 1996 – Section 7

Section 7 places the duty to secure education firmly on the parent.

Duty of parents to secure education of children of compulsory school age.

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable—

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) to any special educational needs he may have,

either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.’

Importantly:

The duty belongs to the parent.

The Local Authority does not become responsible for overseeing, approving, directing or managing that education.



What "Suitable Education" Means

The law does not define suitability by reference to:

- The National Curriculum
- School timetables or hours
- Workbooks/worksheets
- Key stages
- Formal lessons
- Qualifications held by parents
- Regular testing
- Producing written work

R v Secretary of State for Education, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School Trust. Judicial review 1985, The Times, 12 April 1985

Mr Justice Woolf said: 'Education is suitable if it primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the wider country as a whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so.'

Harrison & Harrison v Stevenson. Appeal 1981 Worcester Crown Court (unreported)

The Judge defined the outcomes of a suitable education as 1. to prepare the children for life in a modern civilised society; and 2. to enable them to achieve their full potential

Perhaps no aspect of elective home education causes more uncertainty than the concepts of "suitable" and "full-time" education.

Families often ask:

"How many hours must my child be educated?"

"Do we have to follow school hours?"

"Do we need to teach every subject every day?"

The reality is that there are no simple numerical answers.

Suitability cannot be reduced to a checklist, and "full-time" education cannot be measured solely by counting hours.

Instead, both concepts require officers to exercise professional judgement, taking account of the individual child and their particular circumstances.



Understanding Suitability Without Key Stages or Workbooks

Many home educating families do not use:

- Workbooks
- Formal curriculum schemes
- School year groups
- National Curriculum key stages

They are developing knowledge, skills and understanding appropriate to their individual age, ability and needs.

For example:

- Numeracy through budgeting, cooking, gaming or construction projects
- Literacy through reading, discussion, online communication or creative writing
- Scientific understanding through experiments, documentaries, projects or specialist interests

Parents may not describe learning in terms of key stages, curriculum objectives or age-related expectations, particularly where these frameworks do not form part of their educational approach.

In these circumstances, the responsibility lies with the Local Authority to understand the education being described and to interpret how the child's knowledge, skills and understanding are developing, rather than expecting parents to translate their provision into educational terminology or curriculum language.

What Does "Efficient" Mean?

The term "efficient" is not defined in legislation but has generally been understood through case law to mean education that achieves what it sets out to achieve.

*R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei
Hadass School Trust*



The court stated that: "Education is efficient if it achieves that which it sets out to achieve."

It does not imply perfection, nor does it require that every educational activity is successful. Children may progress unevenly, interests may change and educational approaches may evolve over time. The learning is directed towards enabling the child to learn and develop, rather than a fixed programme that proceeds without adaptation.

For some families, this may involve clearly defined goals such as qualifications, careers or curriculum outcomes. However, not all home educating families work towards predetermined objectives or long-term educational plans. Some educational philosophies intentionally avoid setting fixed goals, believing that children learn most effectively when interests, opportunities and needs are allowed to guide the direction of learning.

In these cases, the educational purpose may be to foster curiosity, independence, critical thinking, problem solving, confidence or a lifelong love of learning rather than to achieve specific milestones by specific ages.

For families following autonomous or child-led approaches, supporting the child to pursue and develop their interests is not the absence of an educational purpose; it is the educational purpose.

The question is therefore not whether the family has a plan or predetermined outcomes, but whether the educational approach is successfully achieving the aims and philosophy chosen by the family and meeting the needs of the individual child.

What Does "Full-Time" Mean?

Home education legislation does not prescribe:

- Twenty-five hours per week
- School days
- School terms
- Lessons

Home education usually happens beyond 9am and 3pm for 190 days each year.

Some Local Authorities refer to school-based teaching hours of approximately 20–25 hours per week when discussing full-time education. Whilst this may be intended as a helpful point of reference, it can unintentionally create the impression that there is a legal requirement for a particular number of hours or that only formal learning counts towards education.



Home education is often delivered through one-to-one interactions, conversations, community activities, practical experiences, independent study and learning that is integrated into daily life. As a result, educational time can be difficult to separate into defined "hours" in the way it might be in other settings.

School contact hours should therefore not be used as a benchmark against which home education is measured. The relevant consideration is whether the education is suitable and efficient for the individual child, rather than the number of hours spent on formal activities.

Understanding "Full-Time" in Practice.

Many home educating families describe learning as something that takes place throughout daily life rather than during clearly defined educational hours.

Children who follow a more structured approach often continue learning outside planned activities through hobbies, clubs, conversations with family members, reading, independent interests and community involvement.

For children following more autonomous or child-led approaches, learning may be integrated into almost every aspect of daily life, including conversations, research, practical activities, travel, museums, meeting new people, creative projects and pursuing personal interests.

Learning experiences also vary considerably in intensity and efficiency. One-to-one support, small group learning or highly motivated independent study can often achieve significant progress in relatively short periods of time. For this reason, the quantity of time spent on formal activities is often far less informative than the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the learning taking place.

Read more about [how home education can be full time](#)

Newly Deregistered Families

When considering whether education is full-time, it is important to take into account how long a family has realistically had to establish their home education provision.

Families who have only recently started home educating may still be adjusting to new routines and approaches. Some children may need time to recover from difficult experiences, rebuild confidence or settle into learning in a different way. Parents may also need time to understand what works best for their child and family.

This period of adjustment is often an important part of establishing a sustainable education and should not automatically be viewed as an absence of education.



Home educating families also take holidays, experience illness and have family commitments, just like any other family. These realities should be considered when looking at how long a family has had to establish their provision.

Examples of Full-Time, Suitable Education

The following examples illustrate how full-time and suitable education may look in different circumstances.

These examples are illustrative only.

They are not templates or requirements.

Example 1: Structured Home Education

A 10-year-old follows a structured approach.

Their week includes:

- Daily mathematics
- Reading and writing activities
- Science experiments
- History projects
- Physical activity
- Educational outings
- Music lessons

Learning takes place across approximately four to five hours each weekday during school term time as they have a sibling in school.

Parents maintain plans and a personal log of the education.



Example 2: Autonomous Education

An 11-year-old follows an autonomous approach.

During one week they:

- Read extensively about Ancient Egypt
- Watch documentaries
- Visit the local museum
- Build a model pyramid
- Write stories based on their learning
- Calculate dimensions using mathematics
- Attend a home education group
- Participate in swimming lessons

Learning is integrated throughout daily life rather than divided into subjects.

Although no timetable exists, the child engages in substantial educational activity, with a similar routine all throughout the year.

Example 3: Child Recovering From School Trauma

A 13-year-old recently left school following severe anxiety.

During deschooling they:

- Read daily
- Listen to audiobooks
- Develop cooking skills
- Explore interests in art and animals
- Attend counseling sessions
- Begin attending community activities
- Gradually increase educational engagement

The parents actively support recovery and educational opportunities expand over time.

A temporary period of adjustment was required.

Poor school attendance prior to deregistration does not predict poor engagement with home education. Many children experience attendance difficulties precisely because the school environment was not meeting their needs. In some cases, home education results in a significant increase in engagement with learning once pressure, distress and school-related trauma are reduced.



Example 4: SEND and Flexible Provision

A 9-year-old autistic child experiences sensory overload and chronic fatigue.

Their education includes:

- Short periods of focused learning
- Frequent movement breaks
- Interest-led projects
- Online programmes
- Speech and language activities
- Outdoor learning
- Occupational therapy exercises

Learning may occur in short bursts throughout the day. With some days being focused on rest and recovery.

Example 5: Teenager Preparing for Examinations

A 15-year-old studies for GCSEs.

Their week includes:

- Online tuition
- Independent study
- Examination preparation
- Practical science sessions
- Essay writing
- Volunteering
- Sports participation

The education is designed around long-term goals and qualifications.

Example 6: Community-Based Learning

A child participates in:

- Forest school



- Scouts
- Home education co-operative classes
- Drama groups
- Library workshops
- Volunteering
- Independent projects at home

Learning occurs across multiple settings and through diverse experiences.

Educational opportunities are regular, varied and meaningful.

Example 7: The ADHD Learner Who Moves Between Interests

A 12-year-old child with ADHD

- Does not engage well with long periods of sustained focus on a single task
- Instead, they move frequently between activities and subjects throughout the day

A typical day may involve completing twenty minutes of mathematics before becoming distracted by a question about volcanoes, leading to research through books and documentaries.

Later, they may spend time building with construction materials, listening to an audiobook while drawing, helping to prepare a meal using measuring and timing skills, attending a sports activity, and then returning independently to complete writing related to an area of interest. Sometimes projects are left unfinished for weeks and, occasionally, are abandoned altogether as interests change. Equally, periods of hyperfocus may result in exceptionally deep understanding and expertise in a particular topic. Educational progress may therefore appear uneven, while nevertheless reflecting meaningful learning and development.

This approach may appear disorganised or lacking in structure. However, for many children with ADHD, frequent transitions between activities support concentration, motivation and information retention. Learning may occur in shorter bursts, with periods of movement and changes of focus allowing the child to regulate their attention and energy levels.

When viewed holistically, the child is engaging in substantial and meaningful educational activity across a wide range of areas. The fact that learning is non-linear, interest-driven and interspersed with movement does not mean it is not full-time or suitable.

You should be mindful that neurodivergent children often learn differently from their peers, and educational provision should be considered in the context of the individual child's needs.



What Should Be Avoided?

You should avoid assuming that education is unsuitable because:

- There is no timetable
- There are no worksheets
- The National Curriculum is not followed
- There is little or no written work
- Education occurs outside normal school hours
- Parents use unfamiliar terminology
- The child learns differently from peers
- The family uses autonomous approaches
- Educational philosophies change over time
- There does not appear to be a plan

These factors alone do not demonstrate unsuitability.

What Home Educators Do Not Have To Do:

EHE guidance¹⁰ states:

Parents are not required to:

- Teach the National Curriculum
- Provide a broad and balanced education
- Have a timetable
- Have premises equipped to any particular standard
- Mark work done by their child
- Formally assess progress made by their child
- Reproduce school type peer group socialisation
- Match school-based, age-specific standards.

Local authority communication can sometimes unintentionally imply that these things are expected.

This may happen through:

- Requests framed around subjects and lessons

¹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ca21e22e5274a77d9d26feb/EHE_guidance_for_parentsafterconsultationv2.2.pdf



- References to curriculum coverage
- Requests for timetables or planning
- Language focused on assessment, targets, and monitoring
- Requests which imply that parents are required to provide evidence or information beyond what is reasonably necessary

In some cases, Local Authorities may unintentionally present optional requests as though they are mandatory requirements. This can lead families to believe they are legally required to:

- Provide samples of work
- Allow home visits
- Complete specific forms
- Provide tutor reports
- Follow school-style structures
- Produce evidence in a particular format

Even where this is not the officer's intention, families may come away believing they are expected to replicate school at home in order to be viewed as providing a suitable education. This perception can be reinforced where families are told that timetables, lesson plans or ongoing monitoring are expected, potentially damaging relationships and creating unnecessary barriers to engagement.

Communication should therefore be carefully designed to avoid implying legal or educational expectations that do not exist within home education law or guidance. The focus should remain on whether the education is suitable for the individual child, rather than whether it resembles school.

Education Act 1996 – Section 437

Section 437 allows Local Authorities to act where it appears that a child may not be receiving a suitable education.

Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996

If it appears to a local education authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they shall serve a notice in writing on the parent requiring him to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education.

The key phrase is:

"if it appears"

This means the authority must have a reason for concern.



When determining whether to serve a s437(1) formal notice to satisfy, the Local Authority should have made all reasonable attempts to understand the home education provision and its suitability. Taking into account different approaches and philosophies, as well as how the education is or is not appropriate to the child.

You should have made an appropriate effort to support the family, offering advice and support which is respectful of their style and philosophy to improve the educational provision.

For example, suggesting that a family adopt highly structured timetables and workbook-based approaches without considering the child's profile may be ineffective or counterproductive for some children. Support should reflect the child's individual needs and the family's educational philosophy.

Support should not be dictated, it should be clearly presented as an option, an idea to consider. Choosing not to follow your advice and instead finding an alternative is valid.

If a formal notice under section 437(1) is considered necessary, it should be drafted in a way that an ordinary parent can easily understand. Whilst some legal terminology is unavoidable, there is no reason why the accompanying communication cannot explain in plain language what is happening, why the notice has been issued, what information the Local Authority requires, the timescales involved and what the possible next steps may be.

Receiving a formal legal notice can be intimidating, particularly for families who may already be anxious, overwhelmed or unfamiliar with legal processes. A failure to respond should not automatically be interpreted as refusal to engage or evidence of unsuitable education.

Some families may delay responding because they are frightened by the wording of the letter, are unsure how to answer, or do not appreciate the significance of the statutory timescale. This confusion can be compounded where previous informal correspondence has included statements suggesting that non-statutory deadlines were mandatory or legally enforceable. Families may therefore struggle to distinguish between requests made as part of an informal enquiry and a formal legal process carrying statutory consequences.

Clear, transparent communication helps families understand the seriousness of a section 437(1) notice while also reducing unnecessary anxiety and improving the likelihood of constructive engagement and timely responses.

Where a section 437(1) notice has been issued, it may be helpful to reflect on whether communication difficulties have contributed to the situation. Some cases arise not because education is unsuitable, but because the Local Authority and family have misunderstood one another, communicated in different ways, or become focused on process rather than information sharing.

Before progressing further, consideration should be given to whether additional explanation, clarification or signposting may assist the family in understanding what information is required and how they might provide it. Signposting to independent organisations, report writing



guidance or local support groups may help remove communication barriers and avoid unnecessary escalation.

Supporting Understanding

Your role should include ensuring parents understand:

- The legal threshold involved
- The steps in the process
- Their opportunities to respond
- Available support

A family that understands the process is far more likely to engage constructively.

An EHE team that ensures parents fully understand home education and the law will notice far fewer instances where communication is lacking.

Local Authority officers should be confident in distinguishing between:

- Statutory duties
- Statutory powers
- Department for Education guidance
- Local Authority policies
- Preferred practices
- Personal opinions

Confusion between these areas can result in unlawful decision-making, unnecessary conflict, and loss of public confidence.

Avoiding the Appearance of Threats

Some families report finding formal correspondence difficult to interpret, particularly where legal terminology is introduced early without explanation.

Examples include:

- Letters with a heavy emphasis on School Attendance Orders
- Legal language without explanation
- Escalatory wording early in correspondence
- Communication that implies they must send the child to school despite there having been no formal notice, or attempt to support



It is far more productive to send positive and supportive communication that clearly lays out the situation.

School Attendance Orders

A School Attendance Order (SAO) is one of the most significant interventions available to a Local Authority. Formal powers should be exercised carefully and proportionately.

Its use should always be viewed as a last resort.

Its purpose is not punishment.

Its purpose is to ensure a child receives a suitable education where concerns have not been resolved.

Before Progressing to Formal Action

Before progressing towards a School Attendance Order, you should ask:

- Have concerns been clearly explained?
- Has the family understood the concerns?
- Has support been offered? (This could mean signposting to a service like Educational Freedom).
- Have communication barriers been considered?
- Have SEND factors been considered?
- Have reasonable adjustments been made?
- Has sufficient time been allowed for improvement or clarification?
- Have the potential educational consequences of school attendance been considered?
- Would formal action improve this child's educational experience?

The purpose of enquiries should be to clarify concerns, not simply to secure compliance

How Historical Procedures Can Inform Practice.

It may be beneficial for Local Authorities to review previous Section 437(1) notices and School Attendance Order cases, particularly those where concerns were ultimately resolved and the education was later accepted as suitable.

When reviewing these cases, consideration should be given to whether the issue was educational suitability or whether the difficulty arose from communication and understanding.



For example:

- Did the family later provide information demonstrating that the education had been suitable throughout?
- Did the family receive independent support which helped them understand what information the Local Authority was seeking?
- Did the family misunderstand the purpose of the enquiry or the need to respond?
- Were the Local Authority's concerns resolved through better explanation rather than changes to the educational provision itself?
- Could alternative wording, clearer communication or additional follow-up questions have obtained the necessary information before formal action was considered?

Identifying patterns within these cases can help you understand whether escalation occurred because education was genuinely unsuitable, or because suitable education had not yet been adequately explained or understood. Learning from these cases may help reduce unnecessary escalation, improve communication, and ensure that formal powers are reserved for situations where they are genuinely required.

Human Rights Considerations

You should understand that home education engages several rights protected under the:

- [Human Rights Act 1998](#)
- [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)

Relevant rights include:

- Article 2 of Protocol 1 — The right to education, including respect for parents' philosophical and religious convictions in education
- Article 8 — Respect for private and family life
- Article 9 — Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Article 14 — Protection from discrimination

These rights are not absolute, and Local Authorities still have lawful duties in relation to children not receiving suitable education. However, you should ensure that any actions taken are:

- Lawful
- Proportionate
- Necessary
- Justified by the circumstances of the individual case

Home education itself is a lawful educational choice. Parents are entitled to choose educational approaches, values, philosophies, and lifestyles which differ from mainstream school systems, provided the education remains suitable under section 7 Education Act 1996.



You should therefore avoid approaches which unnecessarily interfere with family life, impose school-based expectations, or pressure families into particular educational methods where there is no legal basis to do so.

The courts have also recognised that pluralism and educational diversity are important principles within a democratic society. Home education law allows for a wide range of educational approaches, including approaches which may differ significantly from conventional schooling. Respectful, proportionate, and legally informed engagement is more likely to support positive relationships and meaningful cooperation between families and Local Authorities.



Module 15: Good Local Authority Practice

Learning Objectives

- Understand positive communication
 - Recognise poor practice
 - Understand the importance of language
-

Examples of Positive Local Authority Practice

- Clear websites
 - Respectful first contact
 - Transparent explanations
 - Optional support offers
 - Flexible communication
 - Accurate legal information
 - Collaborative SEND understanding
 - Stable relationships
 - Annual voluntary events
 - Exam support schemes
 - Signposting to relevant and up to date support services
-

Indicators of Success

Success should not be measured by:

- Number of visits completed
- Number of forms returned
- Volume of information collected

More meaningful measures include:

- Family satisfaction
 - Quality of relationships
 - Resolution of concerns
 - Accessibility of information
 - Reduction in complaints
-



When Good Practice Works.

Positive, proportionate engagement benefits everyone involved.

When families feel respected, listened to and understood, they are generally more willing to communicate openly and provide information about their educational provision. This allows you to gain a clearer understanding of the child's education and reduces misunderstandings.

Good practice is not simply about how enquiries are conducted. It is reflected in every aspect of a Local Authority's approach to home education.

Examples of good practice may include:

- Providing accurate deregistration information and ensuring schools understand the correct process
- Maintaining a website that explains home education clearly, accurately and without unnecessary emphasis on enforcement
- Recognising a variety of educational approaches and avoiding assumptions that school-based methods are the standard against which all education should be measured
- Ensuring that families of children with SEND receive accurate information about EHCPs, reviews and available support
- Working constructively with local home education groups and independent support organisations
- Reviewing policies and standard letters regularly to ensure they remain legally accurate, supportive and proportionate
- Providing officers with training that includes the lived experiences of home educating families
- Encouraging partner agencies to understand that home education is a lawful educational choice rather than an automatic indicator of safeguarding risk
- Ensuring records are accurate and correcting errors promptly when they are identified.
- Recognising when a concern may arise from a misunderstanding rather than from educational provision itself

Good practice also involves recognising the limits of the Local Authority's role. Families are more likely to have a positive relationship with officers who demonstrate a clear understanding of both Local Authority duties and parental rights and responsibilities.

The benefits extend beyond individual families. Home educating communities regularly share experiences and information. Positive interactions help build confidence in Local Authority services, encouraging other families to engage openly and reducing anxiety about contact from the Local Authority.

Many Local Authorities already demonstrate examples of excellent practice. Where they seek to understand home education, communicate clearly, and approach families with curiosity rather than suspicion, concerns are often resolved more quickly and relationships are strengthened.



Many Local Authorities have benefited from working collaboratively with home educating families and independent organisations when reviewing their home education service. This may include seeking feedback on websites, policies, forms, standard letters and guidance documents. External review can help identify areas where information may be unclear, inadvertently misleading, overly school-centred or inconsistent with current guidance. Small changes can often significantly improve engagement, reduce misunderstandings and build confidence between families and the Local Authority.

Examples of Good Practice

Improving Communication

Following feedback from local home educating families, a Local Authority reviewed and rewrote its standard letter templates. The revised letters used clearer language, better explained the purpose of enquiries and reduced the use of school-centred terminology. As a result, families were better able to understand what information was being requested and responses more frequently contained the information needed.

Reviewing Home Visit Requests

A Local Authority reviewed its practice of routinely requesting home visits after discussions with Educational Freedom highlighted that many families found such requests intimidating or believed they were mandatory. The authority moved towards a more flexible approach, accepting information in a variety of formats. This resulted in improved engagement, reduced anxiety amongst families and a more constructive relationship between the home education community and the Local Authority.

Working with Local Home Education Groups

A Local Authority developed relationships with local home education groups and included information about community activities, support groups and educational opportunities within its resources. This helped newly home educating families access local networks more quickly and reduced concerns about isolation, particularly amongst those who were new to home education.

Improving Website Information

Working alongside Educational Freedom, numerous Local Authorities have reviewed and expanded its home education webpages. Information was reorganised into a more accessible format, legal information was explained in plain English and additional guidance was added on topics such as deregistration, educational approaches, SEND and examinations. Families reported being able to find answers to common questions more easily, reducing confusion and improving confidence.



Providing a Range of Support Options

Following discussions with Educational Freedom, several Local Authorities reviewed the organisations and services they signposted to. Rather than directing families towards a single source of information, they provided a range of independent support options, including both free and paid services. This allowed families to choose support that best suited their circumstances and educational approach while ensuring access to a wider range of information and expertise.

Reviewing Local Authority Practice

Several Local Authorities have invited feedback from Educational Freedom and local home educating families when reviewing policies, forms and procedures. In many cases, relatively small changes have reduced misunderstandings, improved relationships and helped ensure that Local Authority processes better reflect both the law and the realities of modern home education.

Poor Practice Affects Everyone

Local authority practice has an impact beyond the individual enquiry being conducted. The way you communicate, exercise your powers and interact with families can influence how home educators view not only their own Local Authority, but Local Authorities more broadly.

Practices such as unannounced visits, repeated requests for information that has already been provided, presenting optional requests as requirements, demanding access to children, requesting photographs, samples of work or home visits without making clear that these are voluntary, or using unnecessarily adversarial language can damage the relationship between families and the Local Authority.

Where families feel pressured, misunderstood or treated as though they are under investigation despite providing a suitable education, they are less likely to view future contact positively. Experiences are often shared within local home education groups, support networks and national organisations. As a result, concerns arising from a single case may influence the expectations and confidence of many other families.

Home educators frequently communicate across Local Authority boundaries. Consequently, practices that are perceived as unreasonable in one area can contribute to wider lack of confidence of Local Authorities, even amongst families who have never personally experienced those practices.

You should therefore consider not only whether an action is intended to obtain information, but also whether it is necessary, proportionate and likely to improve understanding. Good practice builds confidence, encourages constructive engagement and helps families feel able to communicate openly. Poor practice can have the opposite effect, creating barriers that make future communication more difficult for everyone involved.



The objective should always be to understand the education being provided, using the least intrusive and most proportionate approach available.

Communication Scripts

Initial Welcome Letter

A good introductory letter should:

- Welcome the family to home education and introduce yourself
- Explain the Local Authority's role without misrepresentation
- Explain parental responsibilities with explanations of any legal jargon
- Signpost support
- Avoid threatening language
- Provide a clear explanation of what to expect next

Example Opening

School Name has informed us you have now taken the decision to home educate Child's Name. We want to take this opportunity to welcome you to home education and to introduce ourselves. My name is Name, my colleagues are Name and Name, and we are your Home Education team at Name Local Authority.

We recognise that families choose home education for many different reasons and through many different educational approaches. Our role is to provide information, answer questions and fulfil our statutory responsibilities regarding children educated otherwise than at school.

We have enclosed a leaflet/link to further information, this includes different styles of home education, how to approach those first few weeks, links to local groups, and national support services that have extensive information about home education.

We will be in contact in 12 weeks time to see how you are settling in and to ask for some information about the learning that is taking place. The links provided will help you understand the information we would like to know at that time. After that we aim to be in contact annually to see how things are going and provide any support you may need.

If at any point you require support, advice or information please do email us at email, we aim to respond within 3 working days.



When Information Is Requested

Avoid:

Failure to provide information may result in a school attendance order.

Instead:

We would be grateful if you could provide information about your child's education. This helps us understand the educational provision being made and whether any further discussion may be helpful.

It would be helpful to understand your style/approach, how the education is full time, how literacy and numeracy are learned and some examples of the content, other resources your child has been using and information about social opportunities.

There are guides to help you understand the detail we require on the links found in the enclosed leaflet/link.

When Concerns Exist

Avoid:

Jumping straight to a s437(1) saying you must satisfy us that your education is suitable.

Instead:

Based on the information currently available, we have some concerns regarding whether suitable education is being provided. We would welcome any additional information you wish to share so that we can better understand the provision.

Our concerns are.... (explained fully). It would be helpful to know... (what, how, when).

Example one:

It is unclear how the education is full time. Could you describe your style of learning, and how the informal and any formal learning in numeracy takes place? You provided details of resources used, could you explain a little about how those resources are used throughout the day/week?



Example two:

We are unclear what has been used and the skills being learned. Please provide us with some examples of how Name uses Resource and what did they learn using it.

Example three:

You explained how literacy and numeracy are learned, could you please provide some details of what else your child is learning? This could be documentaries watched, visits to museums, baking etc.

Language Matters

Instead of:

"We require evidence that your child is receiving suitable education."

Consider:

"We would welcome an update about your child's education so that we can better understand the provision being made."

Instead of:

"Provide us with your timetable, plans and what is being learned in maths and English."

Consider:

"We would welcome information that explains how the education is full-time, your style and philosophy, as well as some information about what has been learned for numeracy and literacy."

Instead of:

"Failure to respond may result in formal action."

Consider:

"If you have concerns about the process or need support in providing information, please contact us."

Instead of:

"You must complete the enclosed form."



Consider:

"You may provide information in any format that best reflects your educational approach."

Questions for Self-Evaluation

Can families easily understand our website?

Does our website provide an outline of everything a new home educator needs to know?

Do our letters sound supportive or threatening?

Do you understand different educational approaches?

Do families feel respected?

Are our interventions proportionate?

Do we focus on outcomes for children?



Module 16: Safeguarding and Home Education

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish safeguarding concerns from educational differences
 - Understand that home education is not inherently a safeguarding risk
 - Apply safeguarding thresholds proportionately
 - Avoid bias and assumption-based escalation
 - Maintain professional boundaries between safeguarding and educational oversight
-

Safeguarding and Home Education

Safeguarding is one of the most important responsibilities held by Local Authorities and partner agencies. Every professional working with children has a duty to remain alert to potential safeguarding concerns and to respond appropriately where concerns arise.

However, safeguarding responsibilities must be exercised fairly, lawfully and proportionately.

The overwhelming majority of home educating parents are acting in what they genuinely believe to be their child's best interests. Safeguarding concerns should therefore be based on evidence relating to the individual child and family, not on assumptions arising from educational choice.

Home Education Is Not a Safeguarding Indicator

Choosing to educate a child otherwise than at school does not, in itself, indicate risk.

Home education should not automatically result in:

- Increased safeguarding suspicion
- Lower thresholds for intervention
- Additional scrutiny beyond statutory responsibilities
- Assumptions that children are "hidden"
- Automatic referrals to safeguarding teams
- Enhanced monitoring without evidence-based concerns

The same safeguarding thresholds should apply to home educated children as to any other child.



Visibility, Engagement and Assumptions

Public discussion around home education sometimes includes claims that home educated children are inherently isolated, invisible to professionals, or at greater risk of harm. You should be cautious about allowing media narratives, assumptions, or personal opinions to influence professional judgement.

Serious Case Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews do not demonstrate that home education itself creates safeguarding risk. Where home education appears within a review, it is usually one factor within a far wider context involving pre-existing vulnerabilities, known concerns, and wider professional or systemic failures.

In most cases:

- The child was already known to services
- Concerns existed independently of home education
- Multiple agencies were already involved
- Communication and decision-making failures occurred between professionals

Professionals should therefore avoid confusing correlation with causation.

Safeguarding depends on the quality of professional practice, communication, information-sharing, and decision-making rather than solely on whether a child attends school.

Many home educated children regularly engage with:

- Community groups
- Sports and leisure activities
- Tutors and educational providers
- Healthcare professionals
- Libraries
- Volunteering opportunities
- Extended family
- Wider social networks

You should therefore avoid assumptions that home education automatically results in isolation, invisibility, or reduced safeguarding oversight.



Professional Curiosity and Bias

Professionals should remain appropriately curious where genuine concerns exist. Questions should be explored respectfully, proportionately, and with an open mind.

Professional curiosity involves:

- Seeking to understand
- Considering context
- Gathering information carefully
- Remaining evidence-focused

Bias occurs when assumptions influence professional judgement without sufficient evidence.

Examples may include:

- Assuming home education reduces safeguarding oversight
- Assuming educational diversity indicates neglect
- Assuming legal awareness reflects hostility
- Assuming non-engagement automatically indicates risk

Bias can result in:

- Disproportionate intervention
- Damaged relationships
- Reduced family engagement
- Poor professional decision-making

Professional Boundaries

Professionals should remain clear about the distinction between safeguarding responsibilities and educational oversight.

Social workers are responsible for assessing and responding to welfare concerns where safeguarding thresholds are met. They are not ordinarily responsible for determining the suitability of elective home education unless educational issues form part of the safeguarding concerns being assessed.

Similarly, EHE officers should avoid directing educational provision according to personal preference or school-centred expectations. Responsibility for determining educational methods and approaches remains with the parent, provided the education is suitable under section 7 Education Act 1996.



Professional boundaries can become blurred where:

- Educational disagreement is treated as safeguarding risk
- Social workers begin assessing educational philosophy rather than welfare concerns
- EHE processes become unnecessarily interventionist

Safeguarding concerns should remain evidence-based and proportionate, while lawful parental responsibility for education should continue to be respected.

Situations That Are Not Automatically Safeguarding Concerns

The following, in isolation, do not automatically indicate safeguarding concerns:

- A parent declining a home visit
- Communication taking place only by email
- Autonomous education
- Deschooling periods
- Lack of school-style work
- Children learning outside typical school hours
- Educational philosophies unfamiliar to professionals
- Families questioning Local Authority powers

Building Positive Relationships Improves Safeguarding

Families who have confidence in professionals are more likely to:

- Seek support
- Share concerns
- Ask questions
- Engage voluntarily
- Maintain communication during difficult periods

Conversely, families who fear judgement or disproportionate intervention may withdraw from services unnecessarily.

Safeguarding practice should therefore encourage openness and constructive engagement rather than fear.



Appropriate Responses to Concerns

Where genuine safeguarding concerns exist, they should be managed through normal safeguarding procedures.

Home education should neither:

- Prevent appropriate intervention
- Nor lower the threshold for intervention

The focus should remain on:

- The evidence available
- The child's lived experience
- The seriousness of the concerns identified

Where agencies work together, information-sharing should remain lawful, proportionate, relevant, and evidence-based.

Professionals should:

- Maintain clear boundaries
- Avoid speculation
- Ensure decisions are based on identifiable concerns rather than educational choice itself

When There Are Safeguarding Concerns, or a Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection (CP) Plan

Where a child is subject to safeguarding concerns, a Child in Need (CIN) plan or a Child Protection (CP) plan, it is important that professionals remain clear about the purpose and limits of their respective roles.

The role of the social worker is to assess and manage safeguarding concerns. The role of the Elective Home Education (EHE) officer is to consider whether the education being provided is suitable. These are separate statutory functions and should not become blurred.

A social worker should not make judgements about the suitability of a home education. Likewise, EHE officers should not use educational enquiries as a means of gathering safeguarding information outside the scope of their role. While information will often overlap, each professional should remain within the remit of their own statutory responsibilities.

Where concerns exist about the education being provided, the first priority should be to work constructively with the family. Many parents are willing to adapt their provision once they understand what information the local authority requires or where improvements could be made.



Explaining concerns clearly, providing practical guidance, signposting appropriate resources and allowing reasonable time for changes to be implemented will often lead to positive outcomes without the need for formal intervention.

Professionals should also consider whether difficulties with the education arise because the child was not thriving in school. Home education frequently follows experiences such as bullying, unmet special educational needs, anxiety, trauma or repeated school breakdown. In these circumstances, simply directing a child back into the educational environment that was previously unsuitable may not resolve the underlying issues.

It is also important to recognise that information available during safeguarding assessments may not always present an accurate picture of a child's educational abilities or home education provision. Context is essential.

For example, a social worker may receive information from an optician stating that a child was unable to identify the letters on an eye chart. Taken in isolation, this could appear to indicate that the child cannot read and may contribute to concerns about educational neglect. However, the reality may be very different. An autistic child experiencing significant anxiety or shutdown may be temporarily unable to communicate or demonstrate skills they routinely use at home. Without understanding the child's presentation, conclusions drawn from a single observation may be inaccurate. The parent providing a written report about the provision could therefore appear to contradict the professional's experience, the EHE officer should seek to understand why this difference in information has occurred without accusing the parent of being dishonest in their report.

Similarly, a parent may submit a written home education report that unintentionally fails to demonstrate the breadth or quality of the education taking place. The report may be brief, poorly organised, written by a parent with limited literacy or confidence, or contain photographs from several months earlier that no longer reflect the child's current learning. This does not necessarily mean the education itself is unsuitable; it may simply mean the parent has not effectively communicated it.

In situations such as these, the role of the EHE officer should be to help the family understand what information would better demonstrate the education being provided. This might include explaining what aspects of the provision require further detail, suggesting clearer examples of learning, or inviting the parent to expand on areas that have been misunderstood. By working collaboratively, many concerns can be resolved without escalation.

A School Attendance Order (SAO) or staying on a CIN or CP should not be viewed as the default response where concerns about home education arise. It is intended as a last resort where, after appropriate enquiries, constructive engagement and reasonable opportunities to address identified concerns, the local authority remains unsatisfied that a suitable education is being provided. Before progressing to formal action, officers should consider whether misunderstandings, communication difficulties or incomplete information have contributed to the concerns and whether these could reasonably be resolved through further engagement.



Likewise, the existence of a Child in Need or Child Protection plan should not lower the threshold for educational enforcement. Safeguarding concerns should be addressed through safeguarding processes, while questions about educational suitability should be assessed independently against the legal test for a suitable education. The two issues may coexist, but one should not be used to justify action relating to the other without appropriate evidence.

Ultimately, the aim should always be to achieve the best outcome for the child. Where education can be improved through guidance, clearer communication or additional support, this is likely to be more beneficial than prematurely pursuing enforcement, particularly where returning to school may recreate the very difficulties that led the family to home educate in the first place.

The Impact of Poor Practice

When professionals treat home education itself as suspicious, families may experience:

- Anxiety
- Distrust
- Fear of engagement
- Reluctance to seek help
- Adversarial relationships with services

This can ultimately undermine safeguarding rather than strengthen it.

Examples of poor practice may include:

- Treating home education as grounds for automatic safeguarding referral
- Suggesting home education itself creates risk
- Using safeguarding language to pressure engagement
- Escalating concerns without evidence
- Treating educational differences as neglect

Disproportionate responses damage relationships and reduce confidence in services.



Case Studies

Case Study 1: Assumption-Based Escalation

Background

A family begins home educating following severe bullying and unmet SEND needs.

The parent declines a home visit but offers detailed written information.

Approaches that may unintentionally create barriers to engagement

The officer treats refusal of a visit as a safeguarding concern and refers the family for further investigation without additional evidence.

Good Practice

The officer recognises that declining a visit is not, in itself, a safeguarding issue and focuses on the educational information provided.

Learning Point

Safeguarding concerns must be based on evidence, not assumptions about home education or preferred methods of engagement.

Case Study 2: Historical Social Care Involvement

Background

A family was previously known to Children's Services due to domestic abuse involving a former partner who is no longer involved with the family.

The mother now home educates her children due to unmet SEND needs in school.

Approaches that may unintentionally cause upset

Historical involvement with services is treated as justification for disproportionate scrutiny from the EHE team despite no current safeguarding concerns.



Good Practice

Officers consider the family's current circumstances, recognise that historical vulnerabilities do not automatically indicate present risk, and focus on the child's current educational provision and wellbeing.

Learning Point

Past involvement with services should not automatically result in enhanced scrutiny where no current evidence of safeguarding concerns exists.

Case Study 3: School Referral Following Deregistration.

Background

A child with autism and severe school anxiety has experienced significant attendance difficulties for over two years. The school has struggled to meet the child's SEND needs and the parent eventually decides to deregister and begin home education after the child's mental health deteriorates further.

Shortly after deregistration, the school submits a safeguarding referral to Children's Services. The referral is largely based on:

- Poor historical attendance
- Concerns about the child "not being seen"
- The parent's decision to home educate

No new safeguarding concerns are identified, and there is no allegation of abuse, neglect or immediate risk.

Children's Services nevertheless begin extensive involvement with the family. The social worker requests detailed educational plans, asks to see school-style work, questions the parent's educational philosophy and repeatedly raises concerns about the child not attending school. The family feels pressured to justify lawful home education choices despite no evidence-based safeguarding concerns being identified.

Approaches that may unintentionally create distrust

- Historical attendance difficulties are treated as evidence that home education itself is unsafe
- The school's dissatisfaction with deregistration is conflated with safeguarding risk
- Children's Services become involved in assessing educational suitability despite no safeguarding threshold being met



- Educational disagreement becomes framed as a child protection concern
- The family experiences unnecessary stress and distrust of services increases

Good Practice

Children's Services assess whether any safeguarding concerns exist independently of the decision to home educate. The historical attendance difficulties are understood within the context of unmet SEND needs and school-related anxiety. As no evidence-based safeguarding concerns are identified, educational suitability remains a matter for the appropriate EHE processes rather than ongoing social work intervention.

Professionals remain clear about their respective roles:

- Safeguarding teams focus on welfare concerns where thresholds are met
- EHE officers consider educational suitability proportionately
- Parents retain responsibility for determining educational approaches

Learning Point

Poor school attendance prior to deregistration does not automatically indicate safeguarding risk or predict unsuitable home education. Where attendance difficulties arose because a child was struggling within the school environment, home education may in fact improve wellbeing and engagement with learning. Safeguarding intervention should remain evidence-based, proportionate and focused on actual welfare concerns rather than assumptions about home education or dissatisfaction with deregistration.

Home educating as a social worker

There has been an increase in the number of current or former social workers choosing to home educate their own children, sometimes through choice, other times through necessity. They offer an interesting insight and can be read in Educational Freedom's article: [*Is Home Education Really a Safeguarding Concern? Social Workers' Perspectives.*](#)

Key Points

Safeguarding responsibilities are vital, but they must remain evidence-based, proportionate and free from bias. Home education itself is not a safeguarding risk factor, and serious case reviews do not demonstrate that home educated children are inherently at greater risk of harm.



Professionals should apply the same safeguarding thresholds to home educated children as they would to any other child, focusing on evidence, context and the individual circumstances of the family. The most effective safeguarding practice builds trust, encourages engagement and keeps the child's welfare at the centre of decision-making without treating lawful educational choice as suspicious in itself.

Educational Freedom



Module 17: Data Sharing, Confidentiality and Information Governance

Learning Objectives

- Understand lawful information sharing
- Distinguish safeguarding from unnecessary information sharing
- Avoid inappropriate inter-departmental discussions
- Maintain accurate and objective records
- Understand the impact of data breaches

Home educating families routinely provide Local Authorities with personal information about themselves and their children, including educational information, SEND information, and details relating to family circumstances.

Families are entitled to expect that this information will be handled lawfully, securely, proportionately, and respectfully.

Poor information governance can:

- Undermine trust
- Damage professional relationships
- Lead to complaints or legal challenge
- Expose families to unnecessary distress

Good information governance is therefore an essential part of professional practice.

Why Information Governance Matters

Families are often concerned about how information about them is collected, recorded, and shared.

Common concerns include:

- Information being shared more widely than necessary
- Outdated concerns continuing to influence decisions
- Inaccurate records being repeated across services
- Home education being viewed negatively by other departments



Where families have confidence that information will be handled appropriately, they are generally more willing to engage openly with services.

GDPR/Data Protection Principles

You should understand the key principles of lawful and proportionate data handling.

Information should only be:

- Collected, used, or shared where there is a lawful basis
- Relevant and necessary for a specific purpose
- Factual, objective, and kept up to date
- Stored securely
- Retained only for as long as necessary in line with retention policies

Families should understand:

- Why information is being collected
- How it will be used
- Who may have access to it
- How long it may be retained

The existence of information does not automatically justify its use or wider sharing.

Records should remain professional and evidence-based. Assumptions, speculation, or personal opinions should not be recorded as established fact.

You should also take care to avoid accidental disclosure of information, such as:

- Sharing email addresses through visible recipient lists
- Sending correspondence to the wrong family
- Including another child's information in communications

Even seemingly minor errors can significantly undermine confidence and may constitute data breaches.



Data Sharing Within the Local Authority

The Need-to-Know Principle

The fact that information is held by one department does not mean it should automatically be shared with another.

Information sharing should be based upon:

- A lawful basis
- A clearly identified purpose
- Necessity
- Proportionality

You should ask:

Does this person genuinely need this information in order to fulfil their role?

If the answer is no, the information should not be shared.

Avoiding Assumptions About Home Education

Home education should not automatically trigger wider information sharing.

For example, a child's home education status should not, in itself, result in:

- Automatic referral to safeguarding teams
- Routine circulation of information to unrelated departments
- Enhanced scrutiny without justification
- Inclusion on monitoring lists unrelated to statutory duties

The lawful choice to home educate should not be treated as an indicator of risk.

Inter-Departmental Discussions

Appropriate Professional Discussions

There are occasions where discussions between departments are necessary.



Examples may include:

- Clarifying SEND responsibilities
- Coordinating support already requested by the family
- Responding to safeguarding concerns
- Ensuring statutory duties are fulfilled

Such discussions should be:

- Relevant
 - Necessary
 - Purposeful
 - Recorded appropriately
-

Inappropriate Discussions

You should avoid informal discussions that are not necessary for service delivery.

Examples include:

- Sharing information "just in case"
- Discussing families out of curiosity
- Seeking opinions unrelated to statutory functions
- Using historical information without considering relevance
- Allowing personal views about home education to influence professional conversations

Families should not become the subject of unnecessary professional gossip.

Historical Information

Historical concerns should be considered carefully.

Questions you should ask include:

- Is this information accurate?
- Is it current?
- Is it relevant to the present circumstances?
- Has the family had an opportunity to address it?
- Does it materially affect decision-making?

Old information should not be used uncritically.



Families should not be indefinitely defined by past difficulties.

For example: a single mother now home educating her two children because their Special Educational Needs were not being appropriately supported within school. The family previously had a Child in Need plan due to an abusive former partner who has not been involved with the family for several years.

Historical involvement with services in these circumstances does not automatically justify deeper scrutiny or increased involvement from the EHE team.

You should consider the family's current circumstances, the relevance of any historical information, and whether there is any present evidence suggesting educational concerns. Past vulnerabilities should not result in families being subjected to disproportionate intervention where no current safeguarding or educational issues exist.

Multi-Agency Working

Working Together Appropriately

Effective multi-agency working can improve outcomes for children.

However, collaboration should be purposeful and proportionate.

Professionals should be clear about:

- Why information is being shared
- What information is necessary
- Whether consent has been sought where appropriate
- How confidentiality will be maintained

Home Education Is Not a Safeguarding Concern

The decision to home educate should not automatically alter thresholds for information sharing.

You should avoid allowing assumptions about home education to influence safeguarding decision-making.

The same thresholds should apply as they would for any other child.



Working with Health Professionals

Local authorities are well placed to promote accurate understanding of home education amongst partner agencies.

Where officers become aware that health professionals, schools or other agencies believe that home educated children should routinely be referred to the Local Authority solely because they are home educated, consideration should be given to providing clarification. Home education is a lawful educational choice and is not, in itself, a safeguarding concern.

Health professionals retain their existing safeguarding responsibilities and should continue to act where there are genuine concerns about a child's welfare. However, those concerns should relate to the child's wellbeing or safety, not simply to the fact that the child is educated otherwise than at school.

Providing clear information to partner agencies can help reduce unnecessary referrals, improve professional understanding and ensure that families are not subjected to additional scrutiny solely because they have chosen to home educate.

Local authorities may therefore wish to work proactively with local health services, schools and other partner agencies to ensure that home education is understood accurately and that referrals are made on the basis of identified concerns rather than educational choice alone.

Data Breaches

What Is a Data Breach?

A data breach occurs when personal information is:

- Lost
- Shared with unauthorised individuals
- Accessed without permission
- Sent to the wrong recipient
- Published inappropriately
- Altered without authority

Breaches may be accidental or deliberate.



Examples of Data Breaches

Examples include:

- Sending correspondence to the wrong family
- Including multiple families' email addresses in a visible recipient list
- Discussing a family's circumstances in public areas
- Sharing case notes with staff who have no legitimate reason to access them
- Leaving confidential documents unsecured
- Uploading information to incorrect records

Even seemingly minor errors can have significant consequences.

Responding to a Breach

If a breach occurs, you should:

- Report it immediately in accordance with Local Authority procedures
- Seek advice from information governance colleagues
- Take steps to minimise harm
- Be honest and transparent about what has happened
- Cooperate fully with any investigation
- Reflect on how similar incidents can be prevented

Delaying or concealing a breach can increase both harm and organisational risk.

Being Transparent With Families

Families should understand:

- What information is held about them
- Why it is collected
- How it may be shared
- Their rights in relation to that information

Openness promotes trust.

Where appropriate, you should explain:

"The information you provide helps us fulfil our statutory responsibilities. It will only be shared where there is a lawful reason to do so."



Simple explanations can improve engagement and understanding.

Subject Access Requests and Complaints

Families have the right to challenge inaccuracies and request access to information held about them through established legal processes, including Subject Access Requests (SARs).

Making a SAR should not be viewed as combative, suspicious or indicative of non-cooperation.

Families may request access to records for many legitimate reasons, including correcting inaccuracies, understanding decision-making, clarifying what information has been shared between departments or simply reassuring themselves that records are accurate and fair. You should recognise that transparency promotes trust, and that families who understand what information is held about them are often more confident engaging with services. Requests for information should therefore be approached professionally and without defensiveness.

You should therefore assume that records may be scrutinised by:

- Families
- Managers
- Complaints investigators
- Ombudsman investigations
- Tribunals
- Courts

Professional, factual and respectful recording protects both families and officers.

A useful principle is:

Never record anything you would be unable to justify if it were read aloud in a formal setting.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Informal Information Sharing



Background

An officer mentions a home educating family's circumstances during an unrelated meeting because they are "already known to the authority".

Approaches that may unintentionally distrust

Information is shared without a clear purpose or lawful basis.

Good Practice

The officer only shares information that is necessary for the specific statutory function being discussed and records the reason for doing so.

Learning Point

Familiarity with a family does not remove the requirement to justify information sharing.

Case Study 2: Historical Concerns

Background

A family had attendance difficulties several years ago before beginning home education.

Approaches that may unintentionally cause harm

Historical concerns are repeatedly cited without considering whether they remain relevant.

Good Practice

Officers assess the family's current circumstances, consider the age and relevance of previous information, and make decisions based on present evidence.

Learning Point

Historical information should inform professional curiosity, not determine outcomes.

Case Study 3: Email Error

Background



An officer accidentally sends correspondence intended for one family to another.

Approaches that may unintentionally cause worry

The mistake is ignored in the hope that it will go unnoticed.

Good Practice

The breach is reported immediately, appropriate procedures are followed and the family is informed in line with Local Authority policy.

Learning Point

Prompt and transparent responses minimise harm and demonstrate accountability.



Final Thoughts

The most effective Local Authority officers understand that positive relationships achieve more than enforcement alone.

Families who feel respected are more likely to engage.

Families who understand processes are more likely to communicate in a meaningful way.

Families who receive accurate and supportive information are more likely to succeed.

Ensuring home educating families do not feel alone, and that they're aware of all of their options goes a long way to the home education being suitable to each child.

The goal is to ensure every child receives a suitable education while respecting the lawful choices of their family.



Appendix 1: The Home Educating Parent's Voice

Home educators were asked what are the important things you would want Local Authorities to know?

Here's what people told us:

I wish we had done it sooner, I wish the LA website signposted to support, as it wasn't until I found support that I realised home education really was possible.

The power of independent learning.

Home education often creates specialists.

That home education is so varied it can't be measured. That socialising isn't spending years with the same kids.

That the national curriculum is not the end all and be all of education.

That we're not supposed to be enemies

That home educators are connected, we know which LAs are overstepping. We are watching.

School is but a small part of education. Home educators have a free reign to cover the much wider aspects of education.

I'd want them to understand how children learn. Not the school training but the real neuroscience and I'd want them to be trained and understand all different neurotypes

I would want them to know that telling me that I would be served an SAO if I did not have a home visit made me want to limit communication with them, I did not appreciate the threat.

That kids who have been pulled from school to go into home education due to bullying..
Need to be handled with that little bit of extra care

It doesn't look like school.

It doesn't *have* to look like school.

There's no need to try and make it look like school.



That home education is tailored to each individual child. Different children learn in different ways. Replicating school at home often doesn't work, especially for SEND children.

We do not ask you for support as we cannot trust you. If we tell you we are struggling we see you serving school orders, we struggle quietly instead.

1. Parents in virtually all cases know their kids and make all decisions with their best interests at heart. You can't.
2. It's really important to adhere to the law - education, GDPR and HRA are the most common you need to understand.
3. If in doubt, refer to no. 1 above.

Informal education is still education.
Writing stuff down does not = learning

That no child learns the same way as another.

I would want you to understand that I had to move home, I had to leave family and friends, so that I could be left alone to home educate. My old LA harassed us constantly, and yet, with the same educational philosophy my new LA is incredibly supportive.

When asked what home education is like for your family...

They replied:

Less stress, freedom, learning at his pace, no struggling to fit in.

Child interest led with encouraging engagement in new activities

Freedom to do what we want and do what our children are interested in. It's fun to learn in ways schools don't and I'm so proud of seeing my children grow

Stress free, Freedom

Freedom, flexibility

Freedom to be herself, flexibility and safety

The very best thing I've ever done for my child



Books, board games, and adventures!

Freedom to go with the flow, to do more when we can, to rest when we can't. To spend lazy days with friends and have long walks in the woods and trips to the beach to look for crabs and fossils.

Safe & Content = peace & happiness.

Mental health problems melted away, and my son is happy and enjoying learning again.

Most of the time more relaxing than school.

Whatever we need it to be!

Sometimes calm
Sometimes crazy
Sometimes frustrating
But ALWAYS
interesting!

Like a roller coaster, sometimes we are up and sometimes we're down but we're enjoying the ride either way

Yesterday was amazing. Today it is like hitting my head against a wall.

Actually a big relief!



Appendix 2: Example Prompts That May Help Families Explain Their Educational Provision

Important

This appendix is not intended to be a recommended form and should not be used as a template for Local Authority enquiries.

Its purpose is to demonstrate the types of prompts that may help families explain their educational provision and understand why particular information is being requested.

Families should always remain free to respond in any format they choose. Some may prefer a report, letter or email, while others may prefer a conversation or another method of communication.

Many home educating families are unfamiliar with educational terminology or with the legal concepts of age, ability, aptitude and special educational needs. Explaining why information is being requested often results in clearer responses and fewer misunderstandings.

Questions such as these are intended to support understanding rather than standardisation.

Educational Philosophy

The purpose of these questions is to understand the family's overall educational aims and why home education is considered appropriate for this child.

Examples of questions may include:

- "What are your overall aims for your child's education?"
This helps us understand what the family hopes the child will gain from their education.
- "What influenced your decision to educate in this way?"
This helps us understand the educational principles underpinning the provision.
- "What does a successful education look like for your child?"
This helps us understand the family's priorities and goals.

Educational Style and Full-Time Education

The purpose of these questions is to understand how education operates in practice and how learning forms a significant part of the child's life.



Examples of questions may include:

- "How would you describe your educational approach or style?"
This helps us understand how learning is organised and delivered.
 - "What does learning typically look like within your family?"
This helps us understand how education takes place in practice rather than assuming a school model.
 - "How does learning fit into your child's daily life, routines and activities?"
This helps us understand how the provision operates as a full-time education without relying on hours or timetables.
 - "If learning is largely informal or child-led, how does this work for your child?"
This helps us understand approaches that may differ from classroom-based education.
-

Literacy

The purpose of these questions is to understand how literacy skills are being developed in ways that are suitable for the individual child.

Examples of questions may include:

- "How does your child develop reading skills?"
 - "What sorts of things has your child been reading recently?"
 - "How does your child use writing, communication or language in everyday life?"
 - "What resources or opportunities support literacy development?"
These questions help us understand both the learning opportunities available and why they are suitable for the child.
-

Numeracy

The purpose of these questions is to understand how numeracy skills are being developed within the educational provision.

Examples of questions may include:

- "How does your child develop mathematical or numeracy skills?"
- "What mathematical ideas or concepts has your child been exploring recently?"
- "How are these skills used or applied in everyday life?"
- "What resources or activities support numeracy learning?"
These questions help us understand how numeracy forms part of the educational provision regardless of the educational style being followed.



Wider Learning and Other Subjects

The purpose of these questions is to understand the breadth of learning opportunities available to the child.

Examples of questions may include:

- "What topics, interests or projects has your child been exploring recently?"
- "Are there particular subjects or areas of interest that your child enjoys?"
- "How do these interests contribute to learning and development?"
- "Are there practical experiences, discussions, research or projects that form part of learning?"

This helps us understand the wider educational provision beyond literacy and numeracy.

SEND and Individual Needs

The purpose of these questions is to understand any needs that influence educational provision and how those needs are supported.

Examples of questions may include:

- "Are there any SEND, health conditions or disabilities that affect how education is provided?"
- "Have any adjustments been made to better support your child?"
- "Are there particular approaches, resources or environments that your child benefits from?"

This helps us understand how provision is tailored to the individual child.

Informal, Practical and Hands-On Learning

The purpose of these questions is to understand learning that may not fit neatly into traditional subject categories.

Examples of questions may include:

- "Are there hobbies, projects or practical activities that play an important role in learning?"
- "Are there examples of learning that happen naturally through everyday life?"



- "How do interests or experiences become educational opportunities?"
This helps us understand educational approaches that may not involve formal lessons or written work.
-

Suitability to Age, Ability, Aptitude and SEN

The purpose of these questions is to understand why the educational provision is suitable for this particular child.

Examples of questions may include:

- "How does the education reflect your child's age and stage of development?"
 - "How do you know the level of learning is appropriate for your child's current ability?"
 - "How do your child's interests and strengths influence the educational provision?"
 - "How do SEND or additional needs influence educational decisions?"
These questions help us understand suitability in relation to the individual child rather than against school-based expectations.
-

Progress

The purpose of these questions is to understand how families recognise learning, development and progress.

Examples of questions may include:

- "How do you know when your child has understood something?"
 - "How do you decide when they are ready to move on to something new?"
 - "What changes, developments or achievements have you noticed recently?"
 - "How do you recognise progress within your educational approach?"
This helps us understand progress in a way that reflects the educational approach being followed.
-

Social and Physical Opportunities

The purpose of these questions is to understand opportunities for social interaction, community participation and physical activity where relevant to the child's provision.

Examples of questions may include:



- "What opportunities does your child have to spend time with others?"
- "Are there clubs, activities, groups or communities that form part of your child's life?"
- "What physical activities, sports or outdoor opportunities does your child enjoy?"
- "If your child struggles with social activities, explain how you support them."

This helps us understand the child's wider experiences and opportunities.

Resources

The purpose of these questions is to understand the resources supporting educational provision.

Examples of questions may include:

- "What resources are currently supporting your child's learning?"
- "Are there books, websites, courses, activities or equipment that play an important role in the provision?"
- "Are there particular resources that work especially well for your child?"

This helps us understand how educational opportunities are being provided without requiring evidence, samples of work or access to learning materials.

Final Prompt

One question you may find particularly helpful is:

"If somebody who had never met your child read your explanation, what would you want them to understand about your child, their education and why your approach works for them?"

This often provides context that may not emerge through more structured questioning.

The information needed to understand suitability will vary considerably between children, families and educational approaches, and enquiries should remain proportionate to the individual circumstances of the case.