

Special Educational Needs (SEN) & Home Education

This leaflet aims to start you off in your research to discover more about home educating a child with SEN. This leaflet is split into 4 sections: -

What is meant by SEN?

Home educating a child with SEN.

Taking a child with SEN out of school

England/Wales (N.I. is similar)

Scotland

Contact details of mentioned organisation.

Different sections will be relevant to different families.

EO also produces about 12 other related leaflets. The EO leaflet on Dyslexia covers a wide range of specific learning difficulties and may also be useful for any child who is having difficulties recording work. The EO web site and membership pack contain more information than it is possible to cover in a leaflet.

1. What is meant by SEN?

The free booklet 'Special Educational Needs (SEN) A guide for parents and carers' by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) says:

"The term 'special educational needs' has a legal definition. Children with special educational needs all have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age."

About 20% of children are considered to have SEN at some time during their education, whereas about 2% of children in England will have long term special needs considered to be severe and complex enough to qualify for a Statement of SEN.

This leaflet is concerned with the wide range of difficulties encompassed by this definition.

2. Home educating a child with SEN.

Every child has the option to be home educated. A child with SEN has the same right to home education as any other child, no matter how severe or complex their difficulties.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 (England and Wales) states:

'The parents 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.'*

The law in Scotland is different, but parents can still choose to home educate.

A child has to receive a suitable education; but does not have to attend school in order to receive an education. If your child is attending school and you wish to start

home educating, see section 3 below on how to deregister. If your child is not registered with a school, you do not have to do anything in order to start home educating.

There are many reasons why you may decide to home educate your child. It may be a positive choice because of the benefits it brings to some children and their families. Conversely it may be because the school system is not able to meet your child's needs. Some families come to home education after a child has been excluded from a school that is not meeting their SEN and they are unable to find a suitable school.

(According to the National Autistic Society (NAS) a child with ASD is 20 times more likely to be excluded from school than other children, the main reason being that the school is unable to cope with the child). Whatever the reason, it is every parent's right to home educate their child.

Every child is different and has different needs, and so home educating a child with SEN will involve a wide range of styles and approaches. The law does not set out how home education is to be undertaken. You do not have to follow the National Curriculum. You do not have to follow school hours but can work around the needs of your child and the rest of the family, including any hospital and therapy appointments. The law only requires the education to be suitable and to take into account age, ability, aptitude and any SEN.

There are many advantages to home educating a child with SEN. Children can work at their own pace without being seen as different to the others in the class. They are unlikely to be bullied because they are different. They can work on things that interest them or that will make a real difference to their lives. Speech, physio and occupational therapy can be done daily at a time when children are at their most receptive. If they are tired they can rest. If they are ill they do not miss essential parts of the work, and fall even further behind. If your children need a special diet then you can monitor closely exactly what they eat.

For real life accounts of home educating a child who has SEN visit the Home Education Special Needs web site at www.he-special.org.uk.

One important area for many home educating families is that children may be able to join in household tasks and learn independent living skills. This might include learning how to prepare breakfast for themselves and cleaning up afterwards, dressing themselves and choosing suitable clothes, or having time to practice skills such as chewing and swallowing food. Having more time means that all of these things can be done in an unhurried atmosphere, and are more likely to be both meaningful and successful.

Many children who have changed from school based to home based education take time to adapt. If they had a difficult time at school they may need time for their confidence to grow and time to discover an interest in

learning. ASD children in particular will need time to get used to new routines. Initially some children prefer to cut off from outside life whereas others may benefit from meeting other home educated children and discussing the benefits of not attending school. Be assured that an initial bumpy ride is normal and your child is likely to emerge more confident and self-sufficient.

Parents are often questioned about how children will socialise if they are not in school, but it is important to remember that school does not provide a happy social life for all children. Many children find that they are left out or isolated or even bullied at school, while others just don't manage to make friends amongst their classmates or have difficulty with such large groups of children. Children with special needs may have additional problems with the social life of schools, especially children who are on the autistic spectrum who may be overwhelmed and stressed by the noisy and demanding social environment. Many children are happier with seeing just one or two friends, and being able to choose the time and place, and be able to withdraw when they need to. At home they can also socialise with older or younger children or a mix of children and adults, which can be more successful than mixing with 30 children of the same age. Those who suffer from ill health can make the most of their well times and still get rest and quiet, and will probably pick up fewer viruses.

There are lots of different ways to meet new friends without attending school. It could be through informal activities such as playing in the park, or through joining a local EO group, a mainstream or special holiday club or after school club, groups such as guides or scouts, or through a special interest such as a swimming club or chess club or conservation club. Some areas also have activities like swimming or drama groups specifically for children with special needs. It may be possible in some cases for social services to provide an enabler, and many groups will do their best to accommodate a wide range of individual needs.

SEN-specific resources

EO has a leaflet on resources. Many resources can be found around the house or home made to suit the child. Just because a child has SEN it does not automatically mean that a lot of specialist resources are needed. The best resources a parent may have to offer are love, time and encouragement.

You may be lucky and find that your local library stocks a range of education books, or books about specific needs. They may also stock books written for children about specific disabilities or situations. It may be possible to order specific books that are not usually stocked. Many libraries also display leaflets or keep information about local support groups and children's clubs, and can be a very useful way of finding out what is available in your local area.

Special needs charities usually have relevant book lists, and local support groups may have a lending library of specific books. There are book clubs that lend taped

books for those who have visual or other reading difficulties, for example listening books www.listening-books.org.uk. Health Authority Child Development Centres may have books for loan to parents, plus they may have details of local SEN groups and activities. Like some other charities, the National Autistic Society produces a free leaflet 'Home Education and Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders' plus a publication catalogue.

Some publishers also produce free booklists of related books e.g. Jessica Kingsley (020 7833 2307 or www.jkp.com). Look out for books such as the much-recommended 'Home Educating Our Autistic Spectrum Children' by Dowty and Cowlshaw.

A wide range of books can be found on web sites such as www.amazon.co.uk. If you are buying any books or software from Amazon, EO receives a small percentage for everything purchased using the link from the EO website. The link can be found at the top of the publications pages.

Publishers who have a lot of SEN materials include:

Winslow 01869 244644 www.winslow-press.co.uk
Lucky Duck 0117 973 2881 www.luckyduck.co.uk
LDA 01945 63441
Taskmaster 0116 270 4286
Do2Learn www.do2learn.com

If a professional recommends a book/resource, ask if you can borrow it; if not ask if they will set up a library for parents (a local organisation may be able to sponsor this). Speech therapists are often able to lend games for a short time, and you may be able to make a version incorporating your child's favourite toys or photos of family members. Home made resources can be more relevant to the child than mass-produced ones.

Paediatric occupational therapists will often lend or recommend suitable equipment. They also have catalogues of specialist equipment. If a child would benefit from expensive equipment (e.g. a sensory room) that cannot be otherwise accessed then some charities are willing to help. Libraries have details, as do specialist social workers for disabled children. Some disabled children qualify for Disability Living Allowance, which parents can use to help fund home education. To find out more phone Contact a Family as getting this benefit can be very difficult in some circumstances (your local CAB can also help). A social worker from the children's disability team should be able to give you local details of many suitable activities such as Riding for the Disabled and specialist sports clubs.

Special examination arrangements

If you wish your child to sit exams then the procedure is basically the same as for any home educated child. For more details see the EO leaflet on exams or phone the EO GCSE contacts.

For some children with SEN the exam centre may be able to make special arrangements such as up to 25% additional time, a reader, a scribe or the use of a word processor. The guidelines for these arrangements are produced by the Joint Council for General Qualifications and are up-dated each year www.jcgg.org.uk. The centre should apply for special arrangements at the start of a course of study, and an EP or a suitably qualified specialist teacher will probably need to make the application (check web site).

Contact with professionals and the Local Education authority (LEA)

Having a child with SEN often means more contact with a variety of professionals and more visits to hospitals and clinics. Some of these may be an invaluable source of support, whilst others may not understand the parent's desire to home educate. Opting out of the school system does not mean that you have to miss out on the services of speech therapists, occupational therapists or physiotherapists, as these services can be obtained through your GP or child development centre. It may also be possible to find a therapist through a specific charity, or pay for private therapy, but this last option is usually expensive.

As for all children who are home educated, the LEA may contact you. The amount and type of contact varies and EO can help with this (see EO leaflet on Taking a Child out of School and LEA Contact). If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs (England/Wales) or a Record of Needs (Scotland) the LEA will be required to review the statement annually.

3(a) Taking a child with SEN out of school in England and Wales (& Northern Ireland)

The process of deregistering a child is exactly the same regardless of SEN as long as the child is at a mainstream school. You need only write to the school informing them that you are home educating your child. EO has a leaflet (or see web site) setting out a sample letter to which you only need to add your personal details.

When a child attends a special school, the consent of the LEA is required before the school can remove the child's name from the register. Use the EO sample letter but this time send it to your LEA, in addition to the school. It is a good idea to ask for confirmation by a certain date that the child's name has been removed. The LEA cannot refuse consent without good reason, as to do so would be discriminatory. They may ask for more information before removing the child's name. You will then need to demonstrate that you are able to educate your child in a way that is appropriate to his age, ability and aptitude, and any special needs that he has, but this does not have to be in the same way that was specified on the statement. You do not have to be a specialist teacher of SEN or even a teacher to home educate a child with SEN though some LEAs may tell you this. Be confident in your ability to know and support your child. If you have any difficulty with your LEA contact EO for support and advice.

Some children may have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, a legal document that sets out a child's needs and the specific help he or she should receive. When a child is removed from school to be home educated the Statement remains in force and the LEA are obliged to review it annually (see SEN Code of Practice from DfES para 8.91-8.95). If a home educated child has a Statement, parents do not have to arrange the provision specified in the statement. The education and health authorities do not have to arrange specified provision either: although the code of practice allows them to do this, it is certainly rare. Some Local Education Authorities will fund home based programmes (e.g. Lovaas for children with ASD) though this can be difficult to obtain.

A Transition Review will take place when the child is about 14. At this review many professionals may be asked for their opinion on what needs to be done to help transition into adult life.

Parents can request a Statement to be altered or even ceased, but the LEA does not have to agree to this. Parents can request a home educated child to be assessed for a Statement (Code of Practice para 7:25), but it is worth considering whether anything is likely to be gained from this.

At times there may be disagreements with the LEA. EO will be able to offer advice if this happens, or point you in the direction of appropriate specialist organisations, such as ACE and IPSEA, that can also give free advice. The DfES can supply their free SEN Code of Practice, which is a very detailed guide to the statementing and assessment process, and further information may be available from charities associated with specific disabilities or Contact a Family.

Some LEAs are now using the term Additional Educational Needs instead of SEN. The terms seem to be interchangeable. There are many specialist terms connected with the area of SEN; the free DfES booklets have lists with explanations.

In Northern Ireland the system is similar, but the section that applies is 45(1) of the Education and Libraries Northern Ireland Order 1986 SI 1986/594. Information on the law in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man is available on the EO web site.

3(b) Taking a child with SEN out of school in Scotland

Parents of children with SEN have the same right to make home education provision suitable to the needs of their child as any other parent in Scotland. You need to write to the Local Director of Education and wait for consent before you take your child out of school. If your child is suffering badly from being at school or consent is slow to be given phone EO for advice.

At the time of writing there has been a major review of SEN in Scotland and new legislation is expected to come into force in autumn 2005. The concept of SEN is to be replaced by the concept of 'additional support needs'.

At present, Scottish education authorities have a duty to identify children with 'pronounced, specific or complex special educational needs such as require continuing review'. The duty applies whether a child attends school or is home educated. To undertake this they carry out an assessment of the child, which requires parents to present their child for examination (by a doctor, educational psychologist etc.). The assessment will determine whether a Record of Needs is required. If a child has a Record of Needs it is reviewed annually (similar to a child at school). At 14 years old a child with SEN/additional support needs has a Future Needs Assessment. To find out more, or to get updated information, phone Contact a Family or EO.

4. Contact Details

Education Otherwise

Advice and information on all aspects of home education for the whole of the UK. See end of leaflet for general contact details.

EO Special Needs contact: Christine Waterman
85 Elfrida Rd, Watford, Herts WD18 0AT
01923 464773

christine.waterman@ntlworld.com

Contact a Family

Find out anything to do with disabled children e.g. education, medical information, social services, benefits, charities, support groups, social services, setting up a SN support group, local contacts, sibling issues. Confidential helpline can give information tailored to your needs.

209-211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN
Helpline 0808 808 3555 (Free)
Textphone 0808 808 3556 Minicom 020 7608 8702
www.cafamily.org.uk

Home Education Special Needs

Lots of information including real life examples
www.he-special.org.uk

DfES Publications

Mostly free, English/Welsh documents on SEN and curriculum. The 'Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001)' is very useful if you want to know your rights or check up on what professionals say.
PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley,
Nottinghamshire NG15 0DJ
Tel 0845 6022260

National Autistic Society (NAS)

Information about autism and Asperger's syndrome
393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG
Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004
www.nas.org.uk

Independent Panel for Special Educational Needs

Helpline England and Wales 0800 0184016
Scotland 0131 4540096
www.ipsea.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education

www.ace-ed.org.uk
0808 800 5793

Scottish Executive

Scottish documents including those on education and SEN, mainly free.

Freedom of Information Unit
G-A North, Victoria Quay,
Edinburgh EX6 6QQ
Tel 0131 244 5210

www.scotland.gov.uk/publications

Disability Rights Commission

FREEPOST MID 02164
Stratford upon Avon CV37 9BR
Tel 08457 622633
Textphone 08457 622644
www.drc-gb.org

This leaflet is from the EO Information Leaflet Series

This series is only a guide, not an authoritative statement of law or procedures. The resources mentioned have been recommended by individual EO members and are not necessarily endorsed by Education Otherwise.

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