



Elective Home Education/Home Tuition

ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION/HOME TUITION

Elective home education is increasingly being seen by some parents as an alternative for autistic children. The choice to home educate can often come when parents feel that they are unable to get the right provision for their children. Others feel their time is better spent providing home education from the earliest opportunity.

Many parents/carers will talk of 'battling' to get a Statement of Special Educational Needs in the first place and then 'battling' to get the school to keep to the provisions of it. They often feel frustrated by the system and resort to trying home education.

Positives

For autistic children home education can help relieve much anxiety and stress, especially as they will typically experience difficulties with social interaction and social communication. However, it may also be difficult to reintroduce school at a later stage if needs were to change. Many have sensory issues that may make large classrooms particularly challenging.

Annie says of her 10-year-old with autism, "We eventually removed our son from the school taking responsibility for his education ourselves. This came after a very difficult transition from infants to juniors. Even with full time support he could not cope with busy places, could not tolerate much

noise and experienced sensory overload on a daily basis. We saw his behaviour deteriorate to such an extent that he was becoming more and more aggressive, self-harming, was extremely stressed and was regularly being excluded from school. The school could not meet his needs. They tried to implement a 'one size fits all' philosophy on to a child who did not meet the norm."

She continued "The experience of home educating our son proved consistently positive and the most noticeable changes were in his behaviour. We had time to slowly introduce him to new situations and help develop coping strategies for his differences. After two years at home he was introduced to a much smaller school where with support he generally copes well and attends full time."

Constructive Critiques

Whilst there are benefits to elective home education equally there are pitfalls. Lack of funding is one. Many people have to give up work and their incomes drop severely. Even if you can get the Education Authority to fund a home school-based programme or to provide home tuition, someone needs to be at home and available to co-ordinate the programme and look after the child. The main cost is loss of earnings and perhaps career prospects. Most home educating families live on low incomes.

Support from professionals can also be a problem. When you decide to home educate you are often seen to remove your child from the education system and its support mechanisms.

However, many parents/carers of autistic children will talk of the huge sense of relief at not having to deal with the school and the many professionals involved with their child.

When home schooling, you become responsible for providing opportunities for socialisation, which can be crucial for autistic children. This usually means arranging play dates, trips and visits with other home schoolers, regular trips into your community, i.e. libraries, museums, parks, local clubs and groups.

There is an element of isolation built into the choice to home-school. If you feel that your child needs the regular company of other children to learn essential social skills (even if they might actually be happier in a solitary state) then home-schooling may not be the right option.

There are both positives and negatives to home educating children with autism and each family must make the decision for themselves. In taking this decision the most important factor must be the child's needs. You are the expert where your child is concerned, only you can decide. It will be helpful to involve professionals who have a range of expertise. Therefore, any decisions and choices you make are based on all the relevant information and advice that you can obtain from them.

The Law and Home Education

You do not need to hold any formal teaching qualification, or formal qualifications of any kind to educate your child at home. Nor do you have to have had any higher education yourself. Home educators come from all walks of life. Qualifications may give confidence but you need a desire to help your children learn and the motivation to make a home school programme work.

The right of all children to enjoy excellent quality and effective education is enshrined under Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Education must be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering, with its goal being to strengthen the child's capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and to respect the rights of others. Education should empower children by developing their skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence.

The section of Northern Ireland legislation which allows for elective home education as a legal and equal alternative to school is available from EANI on the following weblink <https://www.eani.org.uk>

Books

- Home Educating Our Autistic Spectrum Children: Terri Dowty and Kitt Cowlisshaw
- School is not compulsory: Education Otherwise
- Learning without school: Ross Mountney
- One to One – a practical guide to learning at home: Gareth Lewis

Contacts

- www.hedni.org
- www.education-otherwise.org
- www.schoolhouse.org.uk
- www.he-special.org.uk
- www.eani.org.uk
- www.elluminateourlives.us

Education Authority (EANI)

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South Eastern EA.....	028 9056 6200
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