

# Flexi-time Schooling

## Towards flexi-schooling and flexi-education

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January 1996  
updated April 2000

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## Introduction

Flexi-time is choosing when to be educated, using schools just as they are.

Initially, flexi-schooling was taken to mean, "the part-time arrangement whereby school and family share responsibility for the child's education in an agreed contract and partnership" (Meighan, 1988). This is now more accurately seen as flexi-time schooling.

School becomes one of many resources, such as libraries, computers, television, etc., to be used when the child and the parents choose, according to a contract between them and the local school.

The parents are as involved as the teachers in their children's education, and the children are encouraged to learn for themselves as well as being taught.

Flexi-schooling is choosing how, when, where, with whom. It amounts to the democratisation of learning, the demise of coercive teaching, and would require the complete redesign of the existing educational system. For this to happen, a school has to adopt a policy of reform towards more flexibility in several or all of its teaching methods, learner roles, parental roles, curriculum specifications, etc.

Ultimately, flexi-schooling can lead to flexi-education, a more flexible approach to all aspects of education and can be applied to aims, power, curriculum and organisation as well as to location and time. This can lead to schools becoming open centres for learning, more like adult education colleges and the Open University in which 'lococentric' and distance learning methods are available. The curriculum is negotiated to suit the individual child and the teacher can adopt further roles - amongst others already existing - such as one more like that of a tutor.

Flexi-education has been described as "alternatives for everybody, all the time" (Education Now Ltd).

Flexi-time schooling, therefore, is the temporary expedient for those who cannot wait for the above, but who, for various reasons, do not want solely to home educate.

Focussing on flexible time arrangements as a first step towards flexi-schooling, these could take the form of so many days or part-days per week; or a block of weeks in school and then a block of weeks out of school.

## Legal Position

In 'Home Education and the Law' (Oxford, 1991), David Deutsch and Kolya Wolf clarify the legality of part-time or flexi-time schooling:

*For some parents the ideal is to educate their children at home for part of the time, and have them attend school for the remainder. This is sometimes called 'flexi-schooling'. Combining schooling and non-schooling education in any proportions is perfectly legal, provided that the net effect is to provide proper education for the child (and the LEA must satisfy itself that this is so). However, the school in question must agree to the arrangement. In a flexi-schooling arrangement the child is a registered pupil at the school and is deemed to be "absent with leave" under sections 39(2) and 39(5) of the Education Act 1944 during periods when he is being educated away from the school.*

These provisions are now to be found in the Education Act 1996 section 444 (3) and (9) which makes it an offence for a parent to fail to ensure that a child of compulsory school age attends regularly at the school at which she is registered. Section 444 (3) states,

*The child shall not be taken to have failed to attend regularly at the school by reason of his absence from the school (a) with leave*

and section 444(9) further defines,

*In this section 'leave', in relation to a school, means leave granted by any person authorised to do so by the governing body or proprietor of the school.*

Another provision enacted now in s19(1) of the Education Act 1996 places a duty upon LEAs to make exceptional provision for education:

*Each local education authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable full-time or part-time education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them.*

Any school, maintained or independent, may accommodate flexi-schooling if it wishes to, but no school is under any obligation to do so. Thus, whereas full-time home education is an absolute right (in the sense that any parent who can provide proper education at home must be allowed to do so), and full-time school education is an absolute right (in the sense that the LEA must find a place for any school-age child whose parent wants him to go to school, nor can an LEA refuse such a child admission to a particular school where there is a vacancy), flexi-schooling is not an absolute right, because the school is entitled to refuse on arbitrary grounds.

When asked in 1994 to respond as to the legality of flexi-time schooling, the Minister of State for Education, Eric Forth, although obfuscating, confirmed the legality of a flexi-time arrangement with the school's permission.

The situation, therefore, with the Local Management of Schools, is that **the LEA can advise governors and the head teacher, but it cannot impose its view. It is legal for the governors and head teacher to agree to a flexi-time arrangement within a particular school.**

Another form of flexi-schooling other than at school, which is also perfectly legal, is for universities to admit children of compulsory school age whom they consider have reached the necessary academic standard to attend their normal courses as part- or full-time students.

## **Funding Position**

Where children attend on an agreed flexi-time basis, they may be recorded as 'educated off site', which is classified as an 'authorised absence'. This means that the **funding is exactly as for a full-time student and the school returns are not affected.**

In this country, therefore, the funding is not split between school and home as it is in the USA's 'Independent Study Programme'.

## **Practical Arrangements**

Permission has to be granted by the head teacher and governing body for flexi-time to be an option at a particular school.

Without this the leave would not be authorised and action would be taken against parents by the LEA in cases where a child was absent without leave on a systematic basis.

A learning contract or personal learning plan can also be agreed that formalises the practical arrangements, e.g. the times the child attends school; that the child will be encouraged and allowed to attend special events that take place at the agreed non-school times in consultation with the child's class teacher; that parents/carers have the same access to records, reports and opportunities to meet with teachers as children who attend school on a full-time basis; that the school has access to all LEA reports regarding the child's education on non-school days; that parents/carers have the same statutory rights as those of children who attend school on a full-time basis; the arrangement to flexi-time may be terminated by the parent during the academic year, but full attendance must begin at the start of a new term only; and the head teacher retains the right to inform parents/carers if the he/she believes that the arrangement is detrimental to the progress of the child.

While a child is registered at a state school, which he/she is if they are flexi-timing, they must satisfy the requirements of the National Curriculum. They may be able to do this in the school hours alone, which leaves greater flexibility at home.

As with home schooling the Inspector may visit at home. The difference is that while for home schooling he/she must be satisfied that the children are learning and progressing generally, with flexi-timers this is evaluated in terms of the requirements of the National Curriculum. This need not be very arduous if the children are working well while at school, or if they are at Key Stages 1 and 2 when most of what a child may be busy with at home will reach one target or another.

## **Pros and Cons**

**Some of the advantages for children and parents of the option of flexi-schooling are:**

- children can be in school for as much or as little of the week as suits their particular style of learning and stage of development;
- children can benefit from individual tuition from people outside school and self-directed learning at home, while also enjoying group activities and different tuition at school;
- children can learn in and from a wider range of environments - libraries, museums, television, radio, computer shops, factories, home kitchens and gardens, farms, transport, landscape, as well as school;
- children can get used to learning in autonomous, democratic and authoritarian contexts;
- children can benefit from mixed-age learning;
- parents can retain responsibility for their children's education and remain as educators of their children beyond the age of five, both in the home and participating in the school;
- parents can continue to learn with their children to a greater degree;
- parents can work in co-operation with the school rather than in adversarial roles;
- parents can undertake flexible working themselves (e.g. job share).

**The advantages for the Local Education Authority and teachers are:**

- the accompanying change in ethos is beneficial: for example, partnership between parents and teachers;
- children are more highly motivated while at school for shorter hours;
- properly managed, the cost savings of fewer pupils and the greater resources per pupil in school at any one time could be far-reaching.

**The disadvantages to the children may include:**

- being seen as eccentric
- looser friendship ties within school
- unfinished project work and missing out on the explanation of new concepts.

**The disadvantages to the parents can be:**

- maintaining close communication with the teacher(s)
- being aware of the standards required at school.

**The difficulties which may arise for the Local Education Authority and teachers include:**

- disrupted project work
- individual attention needed if crucial explanations are missed
- recording work achieved other than at school may require extra input
- communicating with the parents.

In practice, in our eight years' experience of flexi-time schooling these disadvantages have not materialised because the learning the children do in the big wide world more than compensates for the missed schooling and the National Curriculum requirements are met in school hours.

## Structure or Not

This is essentially the same debate as is held in home-schooling circles. The difference is that it will depend to some extent on what agreement children and parents have made with the teacher as to what is expected at home. Our experience is that as long as the children are progressing and learning the schools are not concerned what it is that they are doing or how it is done. Others may expect certain work to be done that ties into school topic work and the output returned to school. Age may play a part in determining this - at Key Stages 1 and 2 there may be much more flexibility.

Some children may enjoy a structured day; others may feel stifled, and their optimum learning times, places and modes may vary from day to day.

## Types of Activities

If your reasons for flexi-time schooling are because you feel you want your child to progress academically faster than he/she would at school, then what goes on at home may need to be an extension of what goes on at school, and the National Curriculum and close contact with the teacher is what you will need.

However, if it is because you feel that there are aspects to education which cannot be offered by schools, then 'the world is your oyster'; what I call the Big Wide World approach to learning, which is necessarily delimited by the demands of running a household as well as by the child's own enthusiasms.

The Big Wide World approach is characterised by more first-hand experience than schools, books or TV can offer, by more outdoors time, more time with a greater variety of places, more surprises and unplanned learning, perhaps as much 'wasted' time (though in different ways) but more intense learning time.

Besides doing many of the things that full-time schoolers can and do do, but with more time and out of peak hours, flexi-time activities that we have enjoyed include:

- independent shopping
- renovating a doll's house
- dissecting a large fish head
- demonstrations of both types of bell-ringing
- skeletons with an osteopath
- visits to a clock mender, an aeroplane cockpit, a boat builder's yard, and the bus station maintenance pit
- project on milk, including doing a milk round at 4am
- microscopes and molecules
- hikes down the Icknield Way and the Wansdyke, and Roman food
- project on wood and timber, tools, a visit to a timber yard and sculptures in wood and glue
- establishing a vegetable patch and selling the produce

- sewing a pair of shorts and a cutlery bag
- Water not Weapons events and 'Landmime', a mime about world debt and the arms trade
- 'working' in two different shops
- drama production, 'Boudicca's Battle'
- pond digging and limnology
- soap making
- captaining a narrowboat
- theatrical costumes at Stratford
- animal and human physiology
- cycling the Belgian canals, the Danish peninsula and a mediaeval Polish town
- bread and marmalade making
- glass painting and marbling
- ice skating and rock climbing
- French and German language lessons
- desk-top publishing and web- site design.

## **Inspections and SATs**

All of the inspections that we have had in our house have been interesting, stimulating, rewarding and mutually supportive occasions. The inspectors have stayed for nearly twice the allotted time, accepted that the children's happiness was the only measure of performance and opined that they wished all children could have the same chance/opportunities/privilege.

Neither of my children has sat their Key Stage 2 Standard Attainment Tests. They go up to secondary school with their teacher assessments, all of which have been average and above, and some above average for Key Stage 3. Bearing in mind that they have not been taught but have directed their own learning at home for two days of the five 'working' days all through the primary years, this would seem to be an endorsement of 'live and let learn' in a flexible home-school partnership.

Finally, if you want a positive outcome without a bruising battle always approach the school, the LEA or the inspectors without any anger - or at least none showing!

## **A National Trend?**

Seven years ago there were no recorded sightings of voluntary flexi-time arrangements for children without a special need.

Six years ago I wrote about flexi-time in the Education Otherwise newsletter. In September 1995 the 'Sunday Times' wrote an article about flexi-time and a local newspaper and ten radio programmes ran items on it over the following ten days. However, Radio 4 PM decided not to run an item on the grounds that it did not amount to a national trend. My response was simply, "Yet".

Since then I have written articles for a variety of newsletters and magazines, including 'Parent', Human Scale Education, Education Now, the National Association of Gifted Children, and

Children of High Intelligence. I have had about two hundred enquiries from parents who were interested in pursuing flexi-time arrangements for a variety of reasons. Recently I notice that more are succeeding in arranging flexi-time schooling in different LEA areas.

## **Flexi-time Defunct**

Once flexi-schooling becomes a real option, flexi-time need no longer be a separate option in itself.

It is arguable that a less rigid approach to learning and education is more appropriate in an era of electronic communications and more flexible working, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that the loosening of the school structure is already underway. The advent of small schools, the Open School, community education, electronic mail, the Web and interactive distance learning, mini-schooling, the emphasis on lifelong learning that the structural changes to the economy and the nature of work are demanding, and the broad remit for the 'deregulated' Further Education Colleges, that allows them to educate people from four years upwards should the colleges so choose, all denote choice and flexibility.

Combine these institutional responses with the increasing numbers of school refusers and school phobics, the ballooning recognition that so many children have 'special' educational needs and the greater parental awareness and control afforded by Local Management of Schools and the stage is set.

Those education authorities that have embraced aspects of flexi-schooling such as flexi-time will be better placed to take advantage of the revolution from schools to learning centres where young people can develop their personal learning plans from a 'catalogue curriculum'. However, the choice and pluralism advocated across the political spectrum and illustrated in part by these examples can be delivered only if the state extends the subsidy to more various learning contexts and access is freely available.

In Birmingham, St. Paul's Community Project for young people, many of whom have been excluded from mainstream school, was awarded grant-maintained status by Government in 1997 after its LEA funding was withdrawn as a budget cut; similarly with a small rural school in Warwickshire which was threatened with closure when the LEA was purging 'surplus' places. With the abolition of grant-maintained schools, they are both LEA 'foundation' schools now.

The University of the First Age and the proposed mentoring between that and the University of the Third Age hint at a more imaginative approach to education in the maintained sector.

Meanwhile, as the school truancy and exclusion data testify, many children are voting with their feet. All children and young people, as the main clients of our school services, should be afforded the dignity of having a real say in their learning: what is delivered, how, where and when. It is an anachronism, when young people are being asked how they want their care to be improved by social services, how they want their out-of-school care to be improved by leisure services, and how they want their neighbourhood improved by planning, that the National Curriculum is foisted upon them, the diktat of old people.

The state has yet to rejoice in the possibilities afforded by flexi-schooling and democratic learning in mainstream education. We look forward to when the opportunity that we have had is readily available at both primary and secondary levels.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION ON FLEXI-TIME SCHOOLING

### From: **School is not compulsory – Education Otherwise**

#### 1.8 Part time Schooling

Can you send your child to school on a part time basis?

Many families would welcome an option between the extremes of full time school attendance and full time home-based education<sup>1</sup> with schools being used for selected subjects or activities. In other cases parents would simply like their children to have some experience of school as part of their overall education. Perhaps part time schooling could be a way of breaking down the monolith of compulsory school attendance, with schools taking on the role of community resource centres.

But whilst there has been a lot of interest in this idea, not all past attempts at part time schooling have been successful:

Stephen, at six and a half, had been home educated for eighteen months when we were approached by the headmaster of a nearby school. He suggested that Stephen could attend class one morning a week, play games, and have swimming lessons at the school. He mentioned that he wanted to boost the number of pupils he had in the school. We immediately contacted the LEA, pointing out that we wished to be fully responsible for Stephen's education, and also asking them to be sure that there was sufficient provision for insurance. They agreed, by letter, to both our points.

There was no doubt that Stephen enjoyed the next twelve months, attending the school part time - however, he showed no inclination to want to attend on a full time basis. Then suddenly, we received a curt note from the headmaster saying that he could no longer accept Stephen at his school because it was now full.

Naturally, we were upset and sure the LEA would be sympathetic towards the fact that a seven-year-old was literally 'expelled' from school for no apparent reason. On the contrary, the LEA said that they were not covered for insurance for part time pupils - so there was nothing they could do.

Schools have often seen part time arrangements as a prelude to full time attendance. One or two LEAs have been happy to support them, but others have been cautious and obstructive:

We recently moved to a village where the headmistress of the local school approached me and kindly offered to let James (seven) and Thomas (four) go to school for extra activities such as chess and debating and to allow them to play in the playground at lunchtime so that they could make friends. Being a village with few children, I found this an attractive proposition, so we all went along one afternoon. The children enjoyed it very much, so the headmistress and I began to make proper arrangements.

But then the local authority reared its ugly head. When the LEA was informed, it took exception to the arrangements. I telephoned one of the underlings, a typical bureaucrat, who went round in circles trying to convince me that 'it is not Council policy' to allow children to be educated part time at school, and that if they are on roll they must be at school full time; if not on roll, then the school cannot accept responsibility for them.

School heads may be reluctant to countenance a long term arrangement without the LEA's support, but logically there is no need for the LEA to be involved (although they may be). Any 'school age' child who goes to school at all must attend regularly, but (in England and Wales) absence 'with leave' does not

count as irregular attendance (Education Act 1993, s 199(3)). It is for the school to grant this leave (s 199(8)). During such absences the child is officially at school, but is effectively being 'educated off Site'. (S)he is therefore covered for insurance and attracts full funding. (In Scotland the situation is less clear as there is no exact equivalent to the provision for absence 'with leave'.)

State schools in England and Wales have a duty to implement the national curriculum, and some of them may be concerned that authorised absences could interfere with its delivery. However, at least one parent has found that in practice it imposes no constraints on what is done at home. If the problem arises, the solution is to work closely with the class teacher to ensure that all elements are covered.

Arrangements for part time attendance are less likely to break down if there is some kind of formal agreement or contract with the school. The terms of such an agreement might for instance include:

- the provision that is to be made at home
- the times at which the child is expected to attend the school
- access to records and liaison with the class teacher
- participation in special events
- conditions for termination of the agreement by either side.

Part time arrangements are sometimes very successful. At one extreme, half days have always been common in reception classes, where many children find a full day too tiring. At the other, some children have done GCSEs on a part time basis, coming into school only for a meeting with each teacher, to bring in work, and to collect marked assignments and new work. This removes any problem about moderating coursework, the child takes the exams at the school, and the fees are paid as they are for full time students.

Some children go to school only for group activities like drama, choir and team sports. Others are taken out on one or two days a week for educational visits, music lessons, or just to have a freer, more peaceful period during the week:

They are competent, independent kids, and for me that is a reward in itself. It allows me to have an interesting job for three days, and for them to do their own thing without me, and then we have a four day weekend when we share our time together and they can follow their own interests.

At its most effective, part time school attendance can enable your child to have the best of both worlds. Time spent at home allows for individual tuition and self-directed learning, whilst time at school caters for group activities and contact with peers. If the staff are flexible enough to adapt to it, it can have advantages for the school too. Teachers are freed to pay more attention to the children left behind, and if they maintain good relationships with parents it need take very little work to coordinate the child's two worlds.

For further discussion of 'flexischooling', see the book by Roland Meighan (see page 111).

# Flexi-time schooling, Flexi-schooling and Flexi-education Information Pack

*Available from Education Now*

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## Flexi-time

For some parents and their children the best arrangement for learning is for part of the time to be at home, and for part of the time to be at school. Some flexi-time arrangements are relatively easy to achieve. These are when **large** blocks of time are spent either at school or at home.

1. All of the primary years are devoted to home-based education, then the secondary years given over to school.
2. The reverse pattern, primary phase in school, secondary phase home-based.
3. Whole years in school, or college, and whole years home-based, as and when seen to be appropriate.
4. In the same way, whole terms are spent either in school or home-based.

The most difficult arrangement appears to be that of a flexible week with two or three days in school and two or three days home-based. This is commonplace in nursery schools in the UK and also later in colleges at the further education phase where flexi-study programmes are made available, and also in some cases in higher education.

The position in law in the UK is that there are two **absolute** rights in education, either to educate at home or to use a school. Flexi-time is a **relative** right so that a school or Local Education Authority can arrange this, but if permission is refused, no reason has to be given. So, each arrangement has to be negotiated afresh, and parents have patiently to explain that it is permissible and that plenty of people have done it and are doing it, and that it does work very well if the will and the vision are there.

Strangely enough, it immediately becomes possible if parents will allow their child to be labelled odd and accept a 'school phobic' label or 'school refuser' description or some other categorisation.

In the USA flexible week arrangements are called Independent Study Programmes or ISPs and are becoming more common. A specially trained member of staff negotiates the timetable with the families concerned.

At first, the idea of flexi-time was described as flexi-schooling in the UK, but the latter notion grew in scope to cover much more than just part-time schooling, so the terms now need to be more carefully distinguished.

## Flexi-schooling

Flexi-schooling is a new blueprint for education derived from the notion that the conventional rigid model of schooling is no longer an adequate vehicle for the development of young people. The idea was developed in discussions between John Holt and Roland Meighan in 1984 during Holt's last visit to England, and not long before his death from cancer. The key idea is that:

*"rigid systems produce rigid people, flexible systems produce flexible people."*

Flexi-schooling developed, at first, as a more open way of viewing the partnership of home, school and community. Some parents do not want to consign their children totally to an educational institution which claims to do the whole job of educating their children for them'. Nor do they want to do all of it themselves in a home-based education programme, although many are forced to do so as the best option open to them. What they seek is a way of having the best of both worlds in the interests of serving their children's needs in a world of rapid change.

Flexi-schooling, even in its first version as **flexi-time**, could be seen to be questioning the basic assumptions of compulsory schooling in Britain in the 1990s:

1. **There does not have to be a single location for education.** There can be several, including school, homes, work-places, museums and libraries.
2. **Parents are seen as having an active educational role** in co-operation and partnership with schools and capable of building on their astonishing achievements of helping their children learn to talk, walk and develop in the first five years of life.
3. **Children can learn many things without a teacher being present.** After all, they managed to learn their mother tongue this way.
4. **Teaching is not synonymous with instructing.** 'Learning Coach' activities, such as helping them locate resources to further their own research, are types of teaching. Thus, facilitating learning is a teaching act as well as 'full frontal' instruction.
5. **Resources available at home can be utilised in educational programmes.** These include the ubiquitous TV, and radio, as well as cassette recorders, video recorders, and home computers.
6. **The uniqueness of individuals can be respected.** Different learning styles can be accommodated in a more flexible system.

In later expanded versions. Flexi-schooling is seen as a much more flexible approach to **education in all its dimensions**, and it raises more questions still. For example, could the curriculum become a negotiated experience more than an imposed one? Could there be choice from the variety of types of curriculum available? In general, it offers the prospect of diversifying, starting from the rigid school system, without losing any positive features that can be identified.

Although flexi-schooling sounds futuristic, a central finding is that some of the key components are already available and operational in different schools, homes and community locations, and in various countries. It is an attempt to see how a new model of schooling can be generated out of the old to respond to the needs of a society in the throes of a communications revolution. We have a changing world. Its technologies and its cultures continue to change and become more complicated. Knowledge continues to grow and existing knowledge is shown to be partial and sometimes in error. Rigid people cannot cope: flexible people have a better chance of coping.

Behaviour in the modern world is also complex. Sometimes we need **authoritarian** behaviour, i.e. the types of responses and people who know when it makes sense to take orders or give them. At other times we need the self-managing skills of **autonomous** behaviour, and at other times the co-operative skills of **democratic** behaviour. The world is multi-dimensional. An adequate education means helping people to grow to match it. Our present school system is, for the most part, uni-dimensional by offering predominantly authoritarian experiences.

John Holt has a proposal about how schools could be invitational rather than based on conscription. It goes like this:

*"Why not make schools into places where children would be allowed, encouraged, and, when they asked, helped to make sense of the world around them in ways that interested them".*

In flexi-schooling, it is proposed that we should rename such places as **learning resource centres** to avoid confusion with the 'day-prison' compulsory attendance, adult-imposed curriculum model of a school.

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8th March, 1992

## **Re: Flexi-schooling in Warwickshire**

I wrote to you on 12 February, 1991 to ask you what was Warwickshire's policy on flexi-schooling. You replied on 22 February asking me for examples in other local authorities. Several authorities have adopted aspects of flexi-schooling; none as yet has a full policy as far as I can discover. Rather than giving up at this point, I should like to take the opportunity to initiate a discussion on flexi-schooling in the LEA. Enclosed with this briefing note is a collection of papers on the subject of flexi-schooling which were put together by Roland Meighan from Birmingham University, (the initiator, with John Holt, of the idea of flexi-schooling), and also a short book on the subject.

Here I summarise the salient issues around the concept of flexi-schooling, both from a child's and his/her parent's points of view, and from the policy-making point of view. I then present to you my petition for flexi-schooling to be made available in Warwickshire schools.

### **1. What is flexi-schooling?**

Initially, flexi-schooling means the "part-time arrangement whereby school and family share responsibility for the child's education in an agreed contract and partnership" Meighan, 1988).

School becomes one of many resources, such as libraries, computers, television, etc., to be used when the child and the parents choose, according to a contract between them and the school.

The parents are equally involved with teachers in their children's education, and the children are encouraged to learn for themselves as well as being taught.

Ultimately, flexi-schooling can lead to a more flexible approach to all aspects of education and can be applied to aims, power, curriculum and organisation as well as to location and time. This can lead to schools becoming open centres for learning, more like adult education colleges and the Open University in which "lococentric" and distance learning methods are available. The curriculum is negotiated to suit the individual child and the teacher can adopt further roles - amongst others already existing - such as one more like that of a tutor.

### **2. What does flexi-schooling offer children and parents?**

Some of the advantages for children and parents of the option of flexi-schooling may be summarised as:

- ◆ children can be in school for as much or as little of the week as suits their particular style of learning and stage of development;
- ◆ children can benefit from individual tuition from people outside school and self-directed learning at home, while also enjoying group activities and different tuition at school;
- ◆ children can learn in and from a wider range of environments, eg. libraries, museums, television, radio, computer shops, factories, home kitchens and gardens, farms, transport, landscape, as well as school;
- ◆ children can get used to learning in autonomous, democratic and authoritarian contexts;
- ◆ children can benefit from mixed age learning;

- ◆ parents can retain responsibility for their children's education and remain as educators of their children beyond the age of five, both in the home and by participating in the school;
- ◆ parents can continue to learn with their children to a greater degree;
- ◆ parents can work in co-operation with the school rather than in adversarial roles.

### **3. What are the implications of flexi-schooling for the Education Department and its teachers?**

So far only individual head teachers at individual schools or colleges have enabled flexible location/time learning by arrangement with parents and children.

Some people argue that a less rigid approach to learning and education is more appropriate in an era of electronic communications, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that the loosening of the school structure is already under way (see, for example, the advent of The Open School, Community Education and Mini-schooling).

Indeed, distance learning and 'telelearning' on a large scale are impending events. Those education authorities which have gradually introduced aspects of flexi-schooling will be better placed to take advantage of the 'revolution' from schools to learning centres.

The accompanying changes in ethos would be beneficial; for example, partnership between parents and teachers; children who are more highly motivated while at school for shorter hours; teachers with fewer children to teach at any one time able to adopt a more co-operative mode of instruction.

Initially focussing on the flexible time arrangements, these could be one of so many days or part-days a week; or a block of weeks in school and then a block of weeks out of school.

Properly managed, the cost savings of fewer pupils in school at any one time could be far-reaching. The administration (e.g. capitation fees) can be arranged as for the current home teaching of school phobic children, or of children with a disability.

### **4. A request for flexi-schooling to be made available in Warwickshire schools to parents who prefer it.**

### **5 "What *is* needed is for the state to support a diverse range of educational provision so that parental involvement can take place and actual provision can be from a variety of different agencies. This would suit our emerging pluralistic society and the pace of economic and technological change." (Philip Toogood, in Meighan, R. Flexi-schooling, 1983, p.55)**

In Warwickshire there will be parents whose children either currently attend school full-time or who are home educated who would take up the opportunity to send their children on a part-time basis.

I therefore end this briefing note with a request for an initial policy enabling head teachers to offer or at least to permit one aspect of flexi-schooling - the opportunity for children to spend time learning at school for part of the week or term and elsewhere for the remainder.

I also request that a feasibility study be undertaken by WCC into the wider implementation of other facets of flexi-schooling mentioned above and detailed in the accompanying papers and book.

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If calling ask for Margaret Maden  
Your ref  
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**COUNTY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
22 NORTHGATE STREET.  
WARWICK CV34 4SR**

**Margaret Maden BA (Hons)  
County Education Officer**

**Eric Wood MSC  
Deputy County Education Officer  
Julian M Davies IPFA  
Deputy County Education Officer**

Date 18th June 1992

Dear Ms Oliver,

I apologise for not replying earlier than this to your letter of 31st March.

The legal views expressed in the extract from 'Home Education and the Law' seem to be correct. It is for an individual school to decide whether it will support a part-time study programme. If or when such a case arose, I would ensure that an LEA officer and an inspector were involved and it could be that there were financial implications which would need to be considered.

Perhaps, if you decide to pursue this strategy, the headteacher should ensure that the area's Senior Education Officer, Mr Fitzgibbon, is involved before any undertaking is entered into.

All good wishes.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Maden  
County Education Officer

**Telex 311419 Fax (0926)412746**

## **Flexi-schooling: a model agreement between parents/carers and school**

Parents/carers who support and select this option do so after gaining the support of the school's governing body.

The school then agrees to enter into the arrangement with the understanding that parents/carers and the head teacher have agreed upon the following criteria:

- The days or half days on which the young person attends school
- The young person will be encouraged and allowed to attend special events which take place on the agreed non-school days/times in consultation with the young person's class teacher
- Parents/carers have the same access to records, reports and opportunities to meet with teachers as young people who attend school on a full-time basis
- The school has full access to all LEA reports regarding the young person's education on non-school days
- Parents/carers have the same statutory rights as parents/carers of young people who attend school on a full-time basis
- The arrangement to flexi-school may be terminated by the parent during the academic year. However, full attendance must begin at the start of a new term or half-term only
- The head teacher retains the right to inform parents/carers if the head teacher believes that the arrangement is detrimental to the progress of the young person.

October 1997

# FLEXI-SCHOOLING AGREEMENT

Academic year \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

I/We wish my/our child \_\_\_\_\_ to attend school in accordance with the flexi-schooling agreement.

I/We fully understand the contract into which I/we have entered into with the school and agree to uphold the criteria which are outlined.

The days chosen for \_\_\_\_\_ to attend school are:

Signed

-----  
Head teacher

-----  
Parents/carers

Date