



Dame Catherine Harpur's School

Reduced timetable agreements (flexi-schooling)

Policy and Procedures

Dame Catherine's School Models

Dame Catherine Harpur's School is an independent school for pupils from ages 3 to 11 which has been developing part-time models of schooling since 2017. In certain circumstances we offer a reduced timetable (3 or 4 days a week) for children who are on our admissions register. A child attending school on a reduced timetable on a long-term basis is commonly known as flexi-schooling. We also offer 2 days a week provision for children who are home-educated alongside full-time education from compulsory school age (after our pre-school provision.)

Our policy and procedures, established by the school Trustees, are revised, if needed, on an annual basis. These models have become popular over recent years and are celebrated as a strength of our school. They attract parents who are committed to a more hands-on involvement with their child's education yet are also looking for a full breadth of opportunities a school has to offer, including having stability over their initial years and a place to learn, play and socialise with friends.

Flexi-schooling as a concept

Whilst flexi-schooling is legal, it is not necessarily a legal right. It is up to the governors or Trust Board of a school to decide whether they might, in principle, accept applications for families wishing to flexi-school and very few schools choose to accept this model. Whilst there is an absolute right for a child to be educated at school and to Elective Home Education, there is no right to flexi-schooling; even where a school might accept flexi-schooling, a head teacher may refuse to agree to requests if they believe that the provision of education overall given the flexi-school model requested would not enable a child to make sufficient progress.

Ultimately, as in other settings which might offer flexi-schooling, at Dame Catherine's, it will be the decision of the Head teacher as to whether he or she is willing to enter into an agreement with the parent/carer. The Trustees have agreed a general approach to requests for flexi-schooling but this does not exempt the Head teacher from the need to consider each request individually.

Whilst essentially flexi-schooling, in order to support parents in understanding how this type of part-time schooling differs from attending our school on a part time basis as a home-educated child, we are now referring to our flexi-schooling as 'reduced timetable agreements.'

Since a child on a reduced timetable remains on the school roll, the school retains the responsibility for the child's progress and for tracking that progress.

Our reduced timetable agreements at Dame Catherine Harpur's School

Our reduced timetable agreement (flexi-schooling) can only be accepted where the school is confident that this part of their education is providing the breadth of education the child would gain in school. This is to

ensure that we are meeting the standards we are required to meet as an independent school, and also incorporating DfE regulations for attendance.

Dame Catherine's uses the experience it has developed over the past 5 years to inform decisions about whether it can offer a place at school on a reduced timetable. It is essential that we are convinced that families understand the differences between our part-time models and that they are in complete alignment with our school ethos, before a child is offered a place which allows him / her to attend part time. This can be particularly difficult when families are new to the school.

It can happen, that a family is applying for flexi-schooling, yet what they are really wanting are many of the benefits of home-educating. For most families it comes down to the number of days they would like their child to be in school. However, for our school, it is more about the differences between being on our admissions register or home educated, and what regulations we are required to follow. Whilst our ethos is to be as accommodating to individual needs as we can be, we still have to work within regulations and consider the needs of all children in school.

It is up to the head teacher to decide whether the school is in a position to offer a place on a reduced timetable. Children on our admissions register must be included in all census returns. Even where a child attends part of the week, he / she is counted as a full place in terms of the school admissions numbers. This means that there will be a limit to the number of part time places the school will be able to offer. The school also needs to carefully consider the balance of children attending under different models and the impact on existing children on roll at the school.

Safeguarding the children is of paramount importance in any decision made.

The headteacher's decision will also be based on whether he or she determines that this model will work for the individual child. This means that the school considers applications **on a case-by-case basis**.

To support the school and the family to make the right decision, the Trustees have put the following in place.

To apply for a place on a reduced timetable a child must have been with us at least 2 terms already (in pre-school or school.)

This could be a child on roll full time moving to a reduced timetable. It could be a child in our pre-school, now starting school or it could be a child who has attended as home-educated and who wishes to attend more days on a permanent basis.

However, if the child is transferring from another school where he / she has been for a year or more, we can consider a discussion with that school to see whether we feel that a flexi-school model would work.

It is worth noting that this differs from temporary part-time attendance arrangements which the school/parent/carers may seek to make. Such arrangements are monitored and reviewed with the intention that the child be returned to full-time attendance as soon as possible.

Which factors might prevent the school accepting an application for a reduced timetable?

The school might not have the capacity to accept new applications for children to attend part time. Where a child attends part of the week, he / she is counted as a full place in terms of the school admissions numbers. The school also needs to allow the capacity for children attending on a reduced timetable to move to full time if requested by parents. This means that there will be a limit to the number of part time places the school will be able to offer.

Reasons for not being able to accept a child on a reduced timetable (flexi-schooling) include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the school perceives that a family is asking for more flexibility than possible within our procedures
- there has been significant indecision in the past regarding which school model the family needs or that it has needed in the past
- a family is wishing to be part of home-education communities and attend events or sessions on days not in school. (We have found that this can lead to occasions attendance at school might be affected.)
- the school believes that there will be occasions where the child will not be with their parent and being educated by their parent on a day they are not attending school.
- there is no evidence of a good attendance record in the past. This could include for example significant time off for holiday or numerous occasions where the child has been late to school
- parents are choosing the school to 'avoid being in a school system.'
- parents have ideas about teaching key skills (such as reading, writing and maths) which are not in alignment with the school.
- failure to provide adequate information to school regarding the child's educational provision when not in school eg. failure to complete the termly brief reports.
- concerns regarding how the parents would work to support the teachers in their capacity as professionals
- the school feels that the way the education based at home and the Dame Catherine's curriculum provision part-time is not offering the child a broad and balanced curriculum.
- attendance on a reduced timetable is hindering the identification of SEN and / or is not meeting the SEN of the child in the best way

Withdrawal of a school place on a reduced timetable

Details regarding withdrawing a school place are included in the financial contract. However, in addition to this, the school might withdraw the agreement for a reduced timetable for the same reasons as outlined in the bullet points above.

Children with an EHC Plan

Where a child has a statement of SEN or EHCP, the decision will be discussed with the local authority. Where flexi-schooling is agreed for a child with a statement/EHCP, this should be recorded on the statement/EHCP and progress monitored through the usual annual review process.

How does a reduced timetable agreement differ from the school's offer for home-educated children

Some parents/carers may decide to provide a suitable education by educating their children at home, often joining home-education groups, rather than seeking to enrol their child at a school. This is known as Home schooling or Elective Home Education. In this case the parent/carer takes full responsibility for the education of the child. Dame Catherine's offers places for home-educated children for 2 days a week and families interested are welcome to read our policy, should they need further information.

Where the school agrees for a child to be accepted on a reduced timetable, this does not mean that parents are home-schooling or home-educating their child.

Children who attend under a reduced timetable agreement **are placed on the school admissions register** and the responsibility for the child's education lies with the school. Parents/carers who request a reduced timetable are asking for a pattern of provision which will involve both attendance at school as well as times when the child will receive educational provision at home. Dame Catherine's considers agreeing to children being absent for 1 or 2 days in order to be educated with a parent / carer ie. we know that they are with a parent. Our school will not agree to children accessing alternative educational provision on the days when

they are not in school. Such provision would need to have been organised / approved by a child's school in order to be an approved off-site activity (as outlined in section 6 of the Education Regulations 2006.) The government attendance regulations for all schools whether state or independent, require that attendance for all children on roll at a school is coded in a specific way. Schools need to consider how procedures are in place to ensure that they are compliant safeguarding wise. If children access any sessions, for example those for home-educated children, we ask parents to remain with them throughout the learning experience. The education provided at home and school should, together, constitute a full-time, suitable education.

What should parents/carers consider when choosing to apply for flexi-schooling?

General guidance and not specific to Dame Catherine's

- The implications of making partial educational provision at home are significant, both in terms of expertise and resources and in the commitment to make a shared provision work. The education provided at home and at school should together constitute full-time.
- While there is no expected curriculum for the home education part of a flexi-schooling arrangement, parents/carers will need to be mindful of the impact on the child's access to the school's curriculum and the possible fragmentation of the learning experience.
- Flexi-schooling is unlikely to be successful if the reasons for choosing it are negative and the choice is motivated by the desire to avoid difficulties around certain subjects for example.
- Flexi-schooling does not give an alternative means of opting out of an element of the curriculum with which a child, for whatever reason, is uncomfortable.
- If the child moves to a different school, there will be no guarantee that flexi-schooling will be able to continue. This will be a decision for the new head teacher.

Guidance more specific to Dame Catherine's

- Parents will need to agree to provide certain information about the child's educational provision for the day / days the child is not in school. Part of this is through a termly report to the school, but we also welcome frequent information by e-mail and children sending or bringing work in to share.
- The same period of notice applies as for a full-time schooling. This includes children who move from a reduced timetable model to being home-educated and attending school on a part time basis. This is because the child will effectively be removed from the school admissions register.
- Our school will not consider fewer than 3 days on this model, given that in such a case, a child would be educated for a greater amount of time at home than at school. The school feels it cannot therefore take responsibility for the child's education if attending for fewer than 3 days.
- Days of the week agreed will be fixed and the child will be expected to attend school on these specific days. Parents should follow the same procedures for requesting leave of absence if they request that their child has one or more days out of school.

How should a request for a reduced timetable (flexi-schooling) be made to Dame Catherine's?

Families applying to the school for a place for their child should make the school aware of this on the school application form. This includes families with child who are attending Dame Catherine's as a home-educated child.

Parents of children who have a full time place and wish to be considered for a reduced timetable (flexi-schooling arrangement) should contact the Head teacher so that the proposal may be considered after any required current notice period has ended.

Should parents apply for this provision a meeting will be needed as part of the admissions process to discuss the specific requirements. Part of this is to explain their rationale behind flexi-schooling. This might be for example to spend time on educational visits with their child or teaching them a certain subject which they might not have access to at Dame Catherine's (eg. a specific language or sport.) It should not be for their child to be educated at another setting for part of the week.

What will need to be discussed?

In all cases where a reduced timetable (flexi-schooling) is agreed, the school will seek to put in place a written agreement with the parents/carers so that expectations and arrangements are clear for both parties. Such an agreement will ensure that parents understand and agree with the school's policy and have discussed the individual circumstances for their child with the headteacher. This discussion, in conjunction with the written agreement, is likely to include:

- Their reasons for wishing to flexi-school and long-term thoughts and plans.
- The normal expected pattern of attendance at school.
- Procedures for flexibility around special events which fall outside the normal arrangement.
- How the register will be marked.
- Current plans for the days when the child will be learning with parents and how the parent(s) is to inform the school of ongoing provision learning at home. This includes how they aim to ensure that the child **has access to a broad and balanced curriculum.**
- Procedures for providing any evidence of learning from home and any useful resources from school.
- A note of any potential barriers for their child and plans to support the child in any such areas.
- An understanding that if a parent/carer chooses to employ other people to educate their child at home, they will be responsible for making sure that those whom they engage are suitable to have access to children and that the parent is with the child for the duration of the sessions.
- Details of any perceived special educational needs and associated provision.
- Arrangements for regular planning and review meetings between parent/carer and school to ensure the child achieves his/her potential and to promote good home-school relationships.
- The circumstances under which, and with what notice, either party can withdraw from the arrangement of flexi-schooling.

What are the charges and what can families with children attending on a reduced timetable expect from Dame Catherine's?

Current fees are available of our website or through the school office.

Our school year is based on 38 weeks and this includes 5 INSET days ie. the school is open to children for a 37 weeks (or 185 days) spread across 39 weeks overall.

All families are expected to contribute pro-rata to INSET days in the same way as families with children on roll.

When organising the school calendar, we do our best to spread the INSET days across different days of the week, given the number of part-time children we have. This bank holiday at the beginning of May is factored into the school calendar elsewhere so that we still offer 185 days over the year. We will work with parents to ensure that a child is able to attend school for the agreed number of days over the course of the year.

Although the child might not be in school full-time, he / she will have a notional 'full-time place' in the school in case he / she wishes to take this up at a future date. The school will prioritise any children who wish to move to a full-time place but asks for as much notice as possible.

Children will be included in the wider life and opportunities of the school such as sports days, performances, family celebrations and events etc. as much as possible. Children on a reduced timetable will be provided with the opportunity of participating in all school visits offered to full time children, even where the visit takes part on a day when the child does not usually attend school.

We accept the child attending on other occasional days where this has been discussed in advance with the school office / headteacher. Changes in days are accepted in certain circumstances only. This should not be a regular occurrence and the school will need at least one week's notice. Acceptable reasons include where there has been an illness or where there is a school visit or special event on a particular day. This doesn't however include swapping days to attend other events or to make up for time spent on holiday.

Whilst the school will do their best to accommodate occasional changes, this might not always be possible due to staffing capacity or restrictions. Should a child wish to attend regularly on an additional day the agreement and charges will be altered accordingly.

The school will provide information in advance as to curriculum content through the challenge question overviews sent to parents. Whilst teachers may be able to give an indication at the beginning of a new challenge theme, any subject which might be taught on specific days, in particular PE or outdoor learning, the school retains the right to adapt this curriculum in order to best meet the needs of the majority of the children and to make best use of staff expertise. As the school teaches certain subjects in an integrated way, it is not always possible to provide a detailed timetable of subjects for each day. There might be a small extra charge for sports provision due to the school buying in specific sporting expertise and equipment. As a general rule, English is taught daily and maths on 4 or 5 days a week. There will be times when the curriculum for the day is altered eg. due to specific themed days or as a result of certain weather.

The class teacher will work closely with the parent(s) and provide work or resources on occasions where it is deemed appropriate. It is not however the responsibility of the school or teacher to provide the work for time spent learning at home, nor feedback on all work done at home. We do however welcome seeing what the child has achieved when not in school and encourage them to share this with their peers. This supports the child in seeing the value of their work at home and contributes enormously to our unique curriculum at Dame Catherine's.

Monitoring reduced timetable agreements

There is not an expectation that we, as a school, monitor the quality of home education on a routine basis, however if it appears to the school that parents/carers are not providing a suitable education as agreed between the school and the parent/carer, the school may ask the parent/carer to review the provision, and reserves the right to withdraw its agreement to the flexi-schooling arrangement.

January 2024