

# Flexischooling in Scotland: Prevalence, policies and the experiences of parents and teachers

By Ally Baker, Demi Powell, Jo Mallett, Lorraine Ishak and Sophia Collins, of Dumfries and Galloway Parenting Science Gang

## Abstract

A study on flexischooling in Scotland designed and carried out by a user-led citizen science group using a variety of methods to ascertain flexischooling numbers and local policies in Scotland, parents views, and teachers views. Findings include: an estimation of flexischooling numbers in Scotland; the over-representation of Additional Support for Learning pupils in flexischooling numbers; the motivating factors for why parents choose to flexischool their children; the surprisingly positive experiences of teachers with experience of teaching flexischooling pupils.

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## Research questions

### FOI requests

How many pupils are flexischooling in Scotland and what is the breakdown? How many requests are turned down? What policies and procedures are in place to guide decisions when requests to flexischool are made?

### Parent surveys

We are interested in the experiences of flexischooling families. Why do families choose this option? What are their motivations, and are they met? What effect does flexischooling have on the child?

### Teacher interviews

What is the experience of teachers who teach flexischooling pupils? How does it affect the teacher and the rest of the class? What effect does it have on the flexischooled child?

## Background to the research

### Flexischooling in Scotland

Flexischooling is defined by the Scottish government as where a child attends school part-time and is home educated for the remainder of the week. The Scottish Government's guidance on flexischooling makes clear that "The feasibility of each request [to flexischool] should be considered on its own merit". But ultimately, it's a decision for the local authority and school as to whether they can support such an arrangement. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/pages/3/> This guidance has statutory status.

Numbers of children flexischooling (or home educating) are not collected centrally by the Scottish Government, so it is not known how many there are or how they are distributed. Education is a devolved matter in Scotland, so the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament have responsibility for it. As a result, the education system in Scotland is significantly different to what's in place in England and Wales.

The principle of Getting It Right For Every Child (often referred to as GIRFEC) was brought into law by the Scottish Government in 2006 across all services for children in Scotland.

"Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) supports families by making sure children and young people can receive the right help, at the right time, from the right people. The aim is to help them to grow up feeling loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential." (source: gov.scot website)

It is based around the principles and values of children's rights and uses the 8 wellbeing indicators of SHANARRI (safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included). All law and policy relating to children in Scotland, including education, has GIRFEC at the heart of it.

## Parenting Science Gang

Parenting Science Gang is a 'user-led' citizen science project, funded by Wellcome. This two-year project has worked with eight parenting groups on Facebook. Each group of volunteers has come up with a parenting-related question they'd like an evidence-based answer to, and then, in collaboration with researchers, designed and run their own experiment or research project to answer that question. It's about engaging the public with scientific research and empowering them to help shape research so that it addresses the questions that matter to them.

One of the eight groups was a local Facebook 'mums group' based in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. Dumfries and Galloway is the third largest region in Scotland, with a population of 149,500 (2016, ONS). It is predominantly rural and the economy is mainly based around agriculture, forestry, tourism and renewable energy.

Some of the PSG groups had a clear interest in common which their research naturally followed (e.g. two were breastfeeding support groups). The D&G group were brought together mainly by geography, and struggled to find one big question a majority wanted to look at. Until we arranged a meet-up (with nannies to entertain the kids and free cake). Given more time to chat, we discovered that coincidentally, several members had children who were flexischooling, and others were flexischooling-curious.

## Parenting Science Gang Flexischooling Group

We organised an online Q&A for members of the group on flexischooling with Dr Helen Lees, a reader in alternative education studies at Newman University, Birmingham. She told us that "I have not yet encountered a paper on flexischooling as it is understood in the UK". "I would imagine there are less than 1000 flexi-schoolers [in the UK] and frankly I think it is likely to be less than 500."

Members of our group personally knew of about 20 children flexischooling locally. The population of Dumfries and Galloway is 149,500 (ONS, 2016), which is 0.22% of the UK population. If there are roughly 500 all across the UK, and they are evenly distributed, then there should be one flexischooling pupil in the whole of Dumfries and Galloway. Either Dumfries and Galloway is a hotbed of flexischooling, or it is much more common than anyone realises. Either explanation would be interesting. But if the latter explanation is true, then it would seem to be a very under-researched area. This crystallised the group's decision to focus on flexischooling for their research.

**=>This is why we have done FOI requests to all 32 local authorities in Scotland.**

Our group are interested in children and their families' experiences of flexischooling. And their motivations for doing it. What effect does it have on the child and on the family?

Does flexischooling lead to the benefits that parents who choose this option are hoping for? Or not? Given our timescales and resources, we decided to focus on what parents say, rather than attempt to interview or study children directly.

### **=>This is why we have done surveys for parents**

The group feel that while they are very interested in the effects of flexischooling on the flexischooled child, anecdotally it appears that in many areas, requests to flexischool are often turned down by schools. The views and expectations of teachers and schools are often the deciding factor on whether a request to flexischool is granted or not. But there is no research evidence for teachers and schools to base those decisions on. Therefore investigating the experiences of teachers who've actually done it would seem to be a valuable contribution to the research literature.

### **=>This is why we have interviewed teachers**

Most members of the group did not have any kind of research background but they were very motivated to conduct this research on a subject which mattered to them. Most of the work has ended up on the shoulders of a very small number of committed volunteers, who were also juggling work and small children, and so we haven't been able to do everything we would have liked. Group members were amazed to realise that there was such a research gap here, and that untrained lay volunteers could identify a series of research questions which no-one seems to have asked. We hope that our efforts (however limited) open up this area of research which is of clear interest to parents, schools and policy-makers in education.

## Literature Review

The term 'Flexischooling' was first elaborated in Meighan's (1988) book: *Flexischooling: Education for tomorrow, starting yesterday*. He explains a beginning understanding in people that there does not have to be a single location for education. Education could occur at home, at school, at libraries or museums. Increasingly popular in current times is for example outdoor education and especially forest schooling, which provides unique learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom (Harris, 2018). Meighan (1988) explains that parents can be seen as having an active educational role in cooperation with schools. He considers flexischooling to be a more flexible approach to education and calls for the school system to be less rigid and more cooperatively negotiated.

Thirty years on, the literature on flexischooling is still quite sparse and Meighan's (1988) text is still relevant today. In fact, many parents and (more concerning) many educators have not heard of the concept, which in practice it is still very much in the minority. Flexischooling exists in Scotland, England and North America, although takes different forms in each place (Pattison 2013). Generally, it is a formalised agreement between the learner, guardian and head teacher, where the learner spends part of the week at school and part of the week in home-based or other education. In an interview with Peter Humphreys, director of the Centre for Personalised Education, Pattinson (2013) defines flexischooling as it works in England and addresses the advantages of the concept.

Humphreys describes the two main scenarios of flexischooling agreements between school and families: Children with special needs or requirements, where head teachers have accommodated their needs flexibly in the best interests of the learner and small, undersubscribed rural schools where taking on flexischoolers has enabled them to survive. But he further states that flexischooling could be chosen for a wide variety of reasons and should not be limited to the stated reasons. Humphreys strongly supports the concept and highlights the transformational experience this could also bring to the curriculum (Pattinson, 2013).

There is limited research on flexischooling so far. The following highlights some findings. Lawrence (2017) dedicated her doctoral research to investigate flexischooling for the benefit of children with autism. Prior to that, she published a guide book for parents, advising why flexischooling might work for their child (Lawrence, 2012). She explains that schools are busy noisy places that are often challenging for children with Autism, but that full-time home-schooling does not give children a chance to develop coping strategies for such situations. This may also leave them excluded from their peers with a very different experience of childhood. Flexischooling provides a more balanced solution where the child has less time at school, so is less overwhelmed but still benefits socially.

The reason for flexischooling need not fall into either of the two categories of rural or special needs, though. In Australia flexischooling has been used as a way to engage indigenous young people in Queensland (Shay & Heck, 2015). Shafer & Khan (2017) looked at flexischooling in the United States and found various influences on the decision to home-school or flexischool children, with rural living and children's disability status amongst the factors affecting parents' decision. This study also mentions that in over 2 million students in the US, 4 % of the population are either home schooled or flexischooled. Similar statistics are currently not available for Scotland or the UK overall.

Gutherson and Mountford-Lees (2011) presented an individual report about a primary school in England. Entitled "New models for organising education: 'Flexischooling' - how one school does it well", the authors describe a very successful model of flexischooling as an option. This thorough report, among other things, asks why developing a flexischooling model is important. It notes that people recognise that learning can be an anytime-anywhere experience and that the current rise of home-schooling shows a demand for education systems to offer something different.

Several studies have asked parents for their views on flexischooling (Gutherson & Mountford-Lees, 2011; Lawrence, 2018), which also aligns with the current research project. Evans (2013) reported that flexischooling can help staff and parents divide time usefully between home and class. However, research on teachers' views is very limited, which lead to another aim of the current research project, to gain a deeper understanding on how flexischooling is seen by staff.

## FOI requests

'In order to establish some baseline data on flexischooling nationally, we submitted FOI requests (please see appendix for full text of the FOI requests) to the 32 Local Authorities. Our hope was to be able to quantify flexischooling uptake at a national level.

Although flexischooling is briefly provided for in Scottish law, there is no accompanying national regulations nor guidance. Furthermore, there is no central requirement to report flexischooling statistics. We were therefore conscious that there was likely to be significant regional variation in all aspects of flexischooling management; from policy to reporting statistics. We therefore hoped the FOI returns would allow us to identify important themes and map regional differences.'

## Method

Freedom of Information requests were sent to all 32 Local Authorities, with questions relating to the following key areas;

1. How the local authority manages flexischooling; (*policies, processes, personnel and information*)
2. flexischooling numbers (of pupils, and of requests) in the Local Authority area.

## Findings

	Number of LAs	Proportion of total (%)
Number of Local Authority Areas in Scotland	32	
Local Authority Areas reporting flexischooling unavailable	2	6%
Local Authority Areas reporting 0 flexischooling pupils	9	28%
Local Authority Areas that declared at least 1 flexischooling pupil	11	34%
Local Authority Areas that provided no or limited data due to s.38 exemption, used s.17 exemption or did not respond to request	10	31%

	Pupil numbers (2017/18)	Proportion of all pupils
Total pupil roll	682,305	
Total flexischooling pupils declared*	345	0.05%
		Proportion of FS pupils
flexischooling pupils primary	133	49%**
flexischooling pupils secondary	137	51%**
flexischooling pupils ASL needs	96	35%**

\*Note that only accurate pupil numbers are included here. Where approximate figures have been provided (some LAs responded with e.g. <5 pupils), they are not included.

\*\* 2 LAs either did not collect or did not provide a further breakdown of pupils. Percentages given here are the proportion of flexischooled pupils out of the ones we have accurate figures for by phase/ASL status.

Top five LAs by number of flexischooling pupils	Number of FS pupils	% of all FS in Scotland	% of all pupils in LA area (LA Total Pupil Roll 2017/18)
Fife	156	45%	0.31% (49,660)
Dumfries and Galloway	62	18%	0.33% (18,752)
Edinburgh	45	13%	0.09% (50,607)
Argyll & Bute	38	11%	0.37% (10,303)
Highland	12	3%	0.04% (30,734)

30 Local Authorities responded to our FOI request, although 1 provided an unclear and incomplete response, leaving us with 29 respondents. Only 17 responses were fully complete, with the remaining 12 being partially answered. Unfortunately, as volunteers, with little previous experience, doing this in our spare time, we missed the deadline to go back and challenge them on incomplete or uncooperative responses.

#### **There are difficulties with definition across the national picture:**

- Only 17 of the 32 Local Authorities recognise or use the term 'flexischooling' as outlined in Scottish Government Guidance
- 4 Local Authorities said they did not recognise the practise of part-time school attendance at all

- There were eight other different terms used by the remaining Local Authorities to describe part-time school attendance. These were:-
  - home education provision
  - timetable to meet child's needs
  - flexible educational arrangements
  - home education on a part time basis
  - flexible approaches to curriculum delivery
  - home education
  - flexible learning plans
  - and one that said "we use different terminology" but didn't say what that was.

**Establishing meaningful data was challenging:**

- 2 Local Authorities did not respond and 1 more submitted an unclear response
- 3 Local Authorities said they essentially do not permit flexischooling and a further 8 said they had no flexischooling pupils
- 7 Local Authorities claimed either full or partial exemption on data
- 2 Local Authorities confirmed they have flexischooling pupils but do not collect data centrally
- Variation in pupil population across Local Authority areas makes direct comparison challenging

**There is significant variance in how flexischooling is managed within Local Authorities:**

- 2 Local Authorities said they did not permit flexischooling and a further 1 said that it only does so on a temporary basis to transition pupils into full time school education.
- 16 Local Authorities manage flexischooling as part of their Home Education system, with only 4 of those making separate reference to flexischooling in their guidance and information
- 3 Local Authorities manage it at Director/Head of Education Level
- 4 Local Authorities manage it within their Additional Support for Learning Team
- 4 Local Authorities manage it at Officer Level in other specialisms within the Education Department.
- 6 Local Authorities manage it within the Quality Improvement Team
- 6 Local Authorities defer the process to Head Teachers in individual schools



### **Flexischooling numbers reported are very small**

- In 2017 the pupil population of Scotland was 682,305
- The data submitted to us records in the region of 350 flexischooling children nationally (i.e. 0.05% of the pupil population), with one Local Authority, Fife, accounting for 44% of those numbers.

### **Tentative Indication of an upward trend in flexischooling requests**

- Of the 11 Local Authorities who recorded requests during the past three academic sessions, 7 showed an upward trend.
- The most notable increases occurred where Local Authorities are actively using flexible arrangements to meet pupils' needs such as Fife and Argyl.

### **Flexischooling at Secondary Level appears policy-driven**

- 10 Local Authorities provided a phase breakdown of flexischooling pupils
- 8 Local Authorities reported flexischooling occurring either completely or predominantly within Primary Schools
- Only 2 Local Authorities, Fife and Argyl, recorded significant numbers of Secondary pupils as flexischooling, (*61 and 38 respectively*). Both these Local Authorities report actively using flexible learning models.

### **Additional Support for Learning appears a significant factor in flexischooling**

- Excluding pupil numbers for Local Authorities that do not report on ASL figures, nationally 35% of flexischooling pupils were recorded as having Additional Support for Learning Needs
- Pupils with Additional Support for Learning Needs make up approximately 24% of the total school population, therefore the figure of 35% of the flexischooling population is significant

### **What the data doesn't tell us about Additional Support for Learning**

- Several local authorities noted alternative educational arrangements that were 'not flexischooling'. They did not therefore report data to us on these arrangements.

- National campaigns in education raise significant concerns about part-time school attendance for children with Additional Support for Learning Needs. However, these numbers are not reflected in the data provided to us.
- These factors might suggest there is an alternative or additional status for part time attendees with Additional Support for Learning Needs, other than flexischooling.

### **A special case: Fife Council**

One response stood out as being completely different from all the other submissions and is worth separate consideration.

- Fife actively uses Flexible Educational Arrangements within its schools
- They submitted a 57-page FEA policy and procedural document, alongside support Home Education policy
- They recorded 156 pupils as currently having FEA, 44% of the total recorded across all 30 respondents
- They had significant uptake within both phases, with 61 Primary pupils and 94 Secondary
- They recorded a huge growth in requests of 330% between academic year 2015-16 (43) to 2016-17 (142)
- All flexischooling requests for the past three academic sessions have been accepted

There appears to be something inherently different in Fife Council's use of flexible learning within their Local Authority. It appears at a superficial level as if there could be a policy driven difference here. It would be of interest to look at this particular area in more detail to find out more.

### **Conclusions**

The primary conclusion that can be drawn from the FOI collection is that there remains a lack of clarity nationally about flexischooling. There are clearly significant regional variations in how government guidance is interpreted and implemented, impacting on the choices available to families.

It also seems fair to state that it is likely that the reported numbers of flexischoolers do not include all pupils who are attending school part-time, by arrangement. It's questionable that the numbers are so low, and unlikely that they are over-estimated. The overall quality of responses was poor and it seems unlikely that well populated Local Authorities like Glasgow would have no part-time attendees. The lack of statutory collection of this data is likely to be a contributing factor.

Numbers may be an under-estimate, either because some families may have an informal flexischooling arrangement with their school, without it being recorded by the Local Authority. Or because some part-time arrangements are not classed as flexischooling, but are treated under a different heading. Therefore local policy interpretation may skew the data.

A researcher in alternative education had told us that 'I'd be surprised if there are as many as 500 pupils flexischooling in the whole of the UK.' Given that these figures record 280 pupils in Scotland alone, either it's far more popular in Scotland than in other nations of the UK. Or flexischooling numbers are higher across the UK than those working in the sector realise.

It's difficult to draw conclusions from such small numbers, but this data would suggest that although numbers of flexischooling pupils are small, they are on the increase, particularly within Local Authority areas that support flexible education.

Two councils - Aberdeenshire and North Ayrshire - said that they do not allow flexischooling. The Scottish Government's guidance on flexischooling makes clear that "The feasibility of each request [to flexischool] should be considered on its own merit" <https://www.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/pages/3/> This guidance has statutory status. "It is not the law that local authorities must consider each flexi schooling request, but it is the law that they should have regard to the guidance which tells them that they should do this." It would appear that these local authorities are unlawfully 'fettering their discretion' in this matter. And these councils may be open to legal challenge from any parent who has had a request for flexischooling turned down.

The data would seem to support the theory that Additional Support for Learning Needs are a significant factor in requesting flexible learning arrangements.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further research;

- Looking at a more effective way of collecting accurate data on flexischooling pupils across Scotland.
- In depth policy comparisons across Local Authorities.
- In depth case studies of a handful of Local Authority areas to identify factors affecting flexischooling uptake.
- Qualitative research with families in different Local Authority areas looking at their experiences of flexischooling
- Long term outcomes studies in the Local Authority areas proactively using flexible learning - specifically, Fife and Argyll. To inform future policy making and help parents make effective decisions about learning routes.

## Parent surveys

Parents filled in an online survey anonymously. We distributed this among local networks our members were part of. Due to this means of distribution we cannot be certain all of the responses were from within Dumfries and Galloway but are certain that most are, possibly almost all. We received 23 responses. We then used thematic analysis to analyse our findings.

For full text of parent survey questions please see appendix

### Sample information

Number of flexischooling children in the family	Number of families
1	18
2	4
3	1
Total completed surveys: 23	Total flexischooling children in families surveyed: 30

When started flexischooling	How many surveyed
P1 - age 4-5	18
P2 - age 5-6	4
P3 - age 6-7	3
P4 - age 7-8	1
P5 - age 8-9	1
P6 - age 9-10	2
P7 - age 10-11	
S1 - age 11-12	
S2 - age 12-13	

Current age	How many surveyed

5	5
6	5
7	6
8	2
9	2
10	4
11	2
12	2
13	1

One respondent chose not to answer either of these questions.

From this data it seems that most people completing this survey had between 1 and 3 years of flexischooling experience. However, 2 parents had children who had been flexischooled for 4 years, and 2 more had children who had flexischooled for 7 years.

### **Additional Support for Learning Needs**

Of the 30 children referred to in the surveys, 6 were identified by parents as having Additional Support for Learning needs (hereafter referred to as ASL), which equates to 20%. One of the parents chose not to identify their child's current age or starting age of flexischooling. The rest are included in the table below.

Current age	When started flexischooling
10	P4 - age 7-8
10	P5 - age 8-9
10	P6 - age 9-10
11	P6 - age 9-10
13	P3 - age 6-7

As this shows, the flexischoolers with ASL needs are all the older children covered in our survey. They also, significantly, represent all those who started above Primary 3. This indicates something significantly different in the way ASL children come to flexischooling to those without ASL needs.

## Motivations

### Needs led and Values led

Of the 23 parents we surveyed, motivations for flexischooling fell broadly into two categories. Firstly, those who felt they were responding to their child's needs, either in response to a recognised ASL need, or due to a perception that the typical school week was too long for their child, predominantly due to their young age. The second motivation cited was the desire to provide their child with broader learning opportunities, particularly outdoor learning (which was explicitly mentioned by 7 respondents). As researchers we wondered about the apparent difference emerging between those choosing to flexi-school in response to their child's need:

Eg.

*"He couldn't cope with full time school so flexi schooling enabled him to have an education he could cope with."*

*"Child struggling in full time education. Very high anxiety around school in terms of learning and socialising."*

And those choosing to flexi-school due to their own values, most of whom chose to flexi-school from the very first year in school:

Eg.

*"I was quite keen to resist the whole machinery of school routine until my child is a little bit older."*

*"Knowing that there are different possibilities than just "the one way""*

*"We get involved in our children education and convey values ignored by schools but dear to us."*

### Balance

Regardless of their motivating factor, the wish to find a suitable compromise or balance for their child's learning was prevalent throughout parents' responses. This was raised in terms of:

- finding a balance of time spent in home and in school that worked better for the child or family eg. *"I was trying to make the school week a little more manageable. The school days are too long..."*
- finding a balance between the institution of school and the learning provided at home eg. *"Wanted to have better balance between institution of school and other kinds of learning."*

*"School is too much for my kids and us. Flexi provides a welcome break and the opportunity to learn/practice other subjects that wouldn't be taught well in uk."*

Four parents would have preferred to entirely homeschool but were unable to, due to family income, or the child's wishes, and so flexischooling was a compromise, another form of balance.

## **Pathway to flexischooling**

### **How did people find out about flexischooling?**

14 from friends, 6 from social media, 1 from school. The most surprising statistic to come out of this though was that 3 made it up themselves or found out through their own research.

### **What was the process of arranging flexischooling?**

Respondents were invited to tick as many as applied to them. Most (10) ticked only 1. Equal numbers (6 each) ticked 2 or 3. 1 ticked 4 options.

18 put in a request to the head teacher, 10 to the local authority. 6 had an informal arrangement, while 4 had a contract.

### **How time is spent**

Of 23 responses, 10 had a day a week at home. Others ranged from a day a fortnight out of school, to the equivalent of two days out per week (sometimes split into half days). When asked what parents spent their homeschool time doing with their children, they were invited to tick all options that applied so there is overlap in the following numbers given.

Most parents (16 for each) said they used their home school time for either 'free play' or 'alternative teaching, including Forest School'.

A significant number of parents used this time for educational outings (13) or for learning led by the child's interests (12). Nine focussed on meeting ASL needs unmet at school (despite only 6 identifying their children as having ASL needs), and 3 accessed some form of therapy.

None said they followed the school curriculum and only 4 spent their time doing homework.

Throughout the survey, 6 respondents specifically mentioned Forest School as an activity their child took part in when not in school.

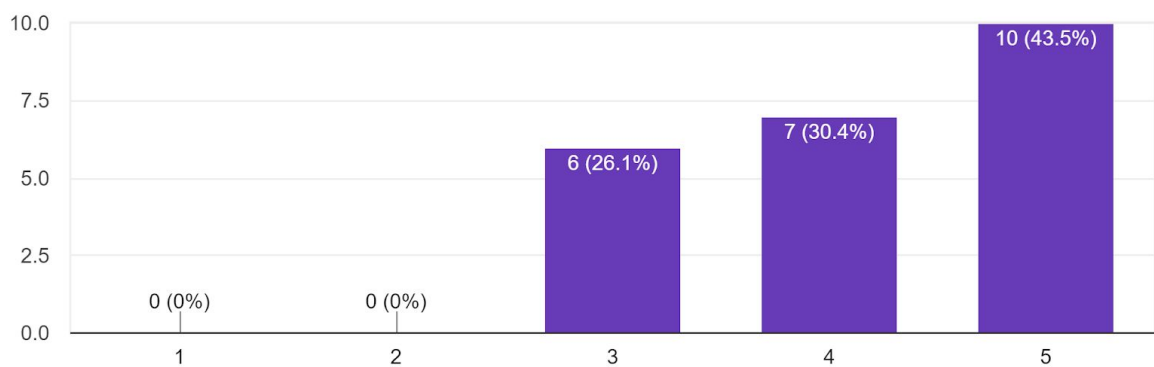
## **Benefits**

Unsurprisingly, the parents who had chosen to complete our survey stated overwhelmingly that flexischooling benefited their child. When asked directly about the effect of flexischooling on family life 23 of 24 respondents stated it had a positive effect, the other respondent stated the effect was "Neutral". No one expressed that it had a negative effect on family life although one parent acknowledged that it did mean parents had less time to get things done.

We also asked parents to rate the effect of flexischooling on the following indicators. We used a Likert scale where 1 = very negative and 5 = very positive.

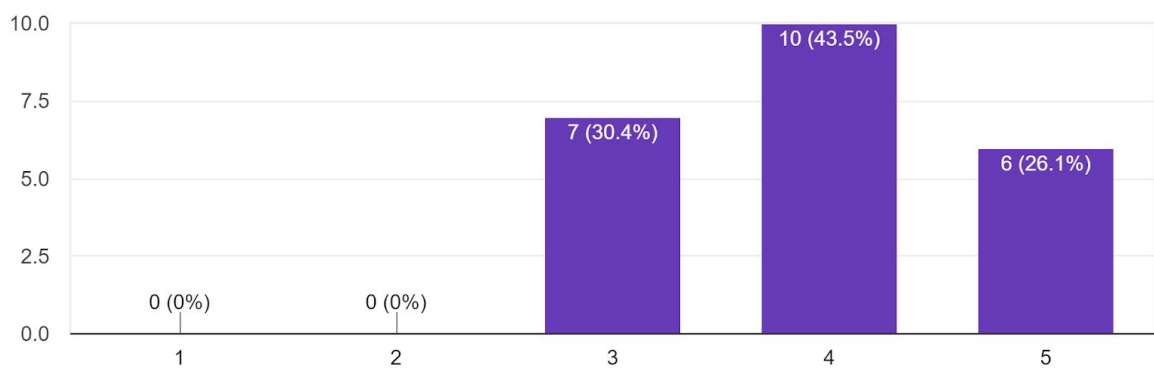
### Do you feel flexi-schooling had an effect on your child's: Education

23 responses



### Do you feel flexi-schooling had an effect on your child's: Social confidence

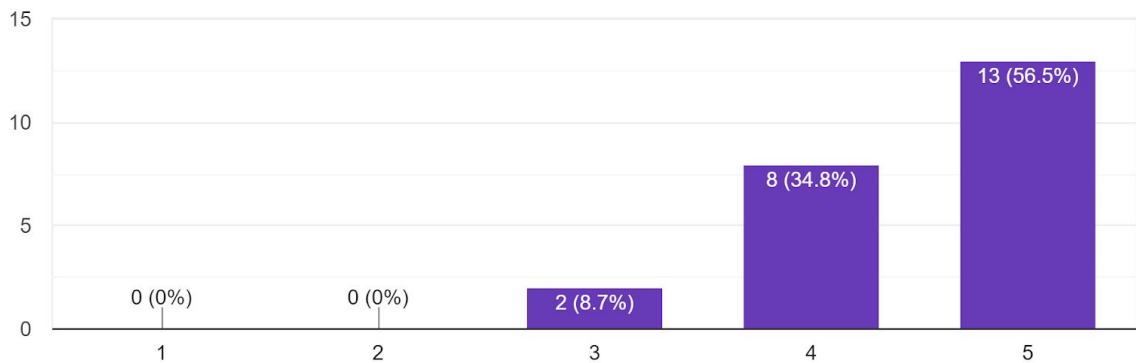
23 responses





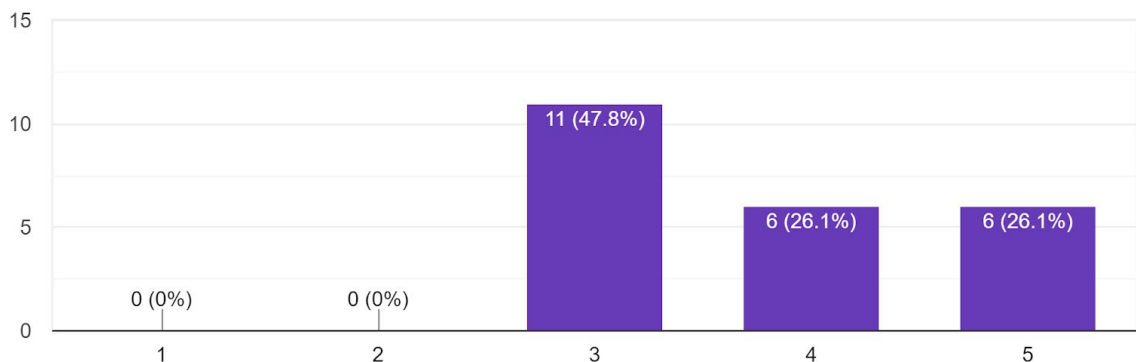
## Do you feel flexi-schooling had an effect on your child's: Wellbeing

23 responses



## Do you feel flexi-schooling had an effect on your child's: Attitude to school

23 responses



The level to which responses were weighted to the positive was striking, particularly in relation to 'wellbeing'. The moderate exception to this trend was in relation to 'attitude to school' where nearly half of respondents rated neither positive nor negative effect.

### Balance

When asked for more detail on their perceived benefits, balance was again frequently referred to specifically:

*"Gave good balance of school and family time for first year of school."*

*"Better balance. Better quality of life."*

More generally, parents referred to the variety of balance flexischooling provided in terms of education, and wellbeing.

Different educational experiences:

Parents stated that flexischooling allowed for adaptable or individually tailored educational experiences. This included those with ASL needs:

*"We can do lots of day trips to museums and parks without any crowds."*

*"Focus can be life skills based in a suitable environment. Learning can be tailored to individual need."*

However, it also encompassed those who wanted to provide alternative educational opportunities and feel more involved in their child's education:

*"He expresses and explores areas of his identity and interests that he doesn't get to at school."*

*"More rounded education with music, Spanish, and nature learning."*

Reduced stress:

Parents felt it enabled life to be more relaxed with less stress. There was a perception that this reduction in stress enabled children to have a more positive attitude to school and learning.

*"Less tired, stopped crying about going to school, happier and less anxious."*

*"My child is less anxious, and more willing to learn."*

*"There are less meltdowns, anxiety has reduced and overall a much calmer household."*

### **Relating to the world**

Another prominent theme which emerged was how flexischooling affected the way in which a child related to the world including to peers, family, and the institution or authority represented by school.

Peers:

Many parents stated that it enabled their child to broaden or strengthen their social bonds with peers and adults outside of school, particularly at Forest School.

*"He enjoys bonding with peers at forest school in a way he doesn't at school."*

Family:

Others noticed the positive effect on family relationships of spending more "quality time" together:

*"Closer as a family."*

*"We have more time together leading to better understanding of each other and a broader shared experience in life."*

Institutions:

Some parents valued the way flexischooling opened the minds of their children to alternatives from the mainstream institution of school:

*"Giving them choice the feel better about school."*

*"It made her realise school isn't a completely compulsory activity, and there are other options."*

*"Knowing that there are different possibilities than just "the one way"."*

*"While I think that our local school is fantastic, I do think it is good not to have school dominating our week, at this very young age."*

## **Drawbacks**

When asked to consider the drawbacks of flexischooling for their child, 5 of the 22 respondents said "none". Of the remaining 17, responses fell into two categories. Firstly, a concern about missing things at school. Eight mentioned school learning or activities, although others pointed out that the flexible nature of the arrangement enabled children to attend school for particular planned events.

Others expressed concern that their child missed out socially:

*"They sometimes miss a beat with the games in the playground."*

*"I wonder if that contributed to their being excluded or picked on in primary school."*

This is an interesting counterpoint to the earlier comments by some about the benefits felt due to alternative social interaction enabled by Forest School.

The other drawback identified by parents was their perception that the school or teacher found it difficult to accommodate, with 6 of 22 respondents mentioning this.

*"Schools are so rigid, the teachers really struggled to work around even one day flexi schooling."*

*"Negative attitude of teacher, head teacher is very supportive."*

## **Advice for families considering flexischooling**

Of 19 respondents, an overwhelming 18 specifically said something similar to "do it" or "try it" which may be unsurprising given that all respondents had done so themselves. However, some warning was noted by the 4 respondents who stated the need for "bravery" or "courage" in relation to discussions with the school regarding flexischooling.

*"Be courageous and if this is what is needed for your child to thrive and be happy, do it. Schools must consider the needs of every child and understand education does not only happen within the classroom!"*

There was acknowledgement from five parents that it could be tough on schools and it was therefore important to communicate well with the school. Some additionally advocated for offering extra support for the school.

*"I think that good dialogue with the class teacher is crucial to help make the right decision for your child and ensure that they have all the learning that they require."*

*"Be gentle and supportive of teachers, contribute to school as much as poss, help with arranging meeting/communicating well with teachers/other parents. Support the teachers well, as it is harder for them to deal with."*

However one parents stated the direct opposite.

*"Probably don't ask, just do it!"*

An equal number (five) counselled parents to consider the needs of their child when making a decision about flexischooling.

*"Works well for some, may not work for every child."*

*"It can be a really positive step especially if your child is struggling in school."*

## **Summary**

The first of the two main overarching themes of our Parent Surveys was in relation to parents' motivations for flexischooling being either needs led or values led. Many parents felt that flexischooling enabled them to respond to their child's needs and provide alternative education or experiences, with a particular focus on spending time outdoors, or find additional support or space for their child to cope better with their Additional Support for Learning need. There was also a strong evidence of parents being led by

their values and using flexischooling as a way to encourage their child to relate differently to the world including their peers, their family, their school and, more broadly the institutions or systems of authority.

The second theme to emerge from our Parent Survey was in relation to parents' perception that the consequence of Flexischooling (whether intended or unintended) was to enable more balance. This related to the balance of time spent between family life and school life. It also related to the balance of forms and areas of education. A few also stated that flexischooling enabled a balance between the desire for homeschooling and the desire or necessity of mainstream schooling. These two themes were closely interlinked as those parents led by either needs or values described, in different ways, the balance flexischooling enabled.

It was clear that the parents completing our survey did not want to reject mainstream schooling altogether and saw benefits of it which they wanted their child to experience. However, whether motivated by responding to their child's needs, or due to their own held values, flexischooling offered a balance that neither exclusively homeschooling nor mainstream schooling could offer on their own.

## Teacher Interviews

We interviewed four primary teachers. All had been teaching for over ten years and currently teach (or most recently taught - one is recently retired) in relatively small rural schools in Dumfries and Galloway. Three had had several flexischooling children in their classes, over the years. One taught in a small school with several flexischooling children, and had some teaching and supervisory contact with the children, but had not been their class teacher. This teacher's own primary-aged child is flexischooling, so they represent an interesting dual perspective.

Interviews were semi-structured. For practical reasons, two were conducted by phone and two in person (all by the same interviewer). All interviews were transcribed and then transcripts were analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

### **Flexischooling doesn't negatively impact anyone else**

Our primary goal was to find out whether or not there were any negative effects from flexischooling. Anecdotally (for example, from posts in the 'Flexischooling UK' group on Facebook), many parents would like to flexischool, but their requests are turned down by the school. We were interested to know, do teachers who experience flexischooling experience any negative effects, which might support this decision by schools? We foresaw three possible avenues of negative effect - an effect on the child themselves, or an effect on the teacher (perhaps increased workload), or an effect on the rest of the class (perhaps from disruption).

When explicitly asked this question, the teachers all said there were no negative effects on them as a teacher.

*"I wouldn't say there'd be a negative impact on that at all... I wouldn't suggest there was any extra workload. I haven't found any negative points in my respect that make it trickier or make it more difficult for me to do my job. I wouldn't suggest there would be any more paperwork."*

*"Not as it has been at the moment and probably, the child that I kept for the two years that was... I had one or two meetings with mum, but that was a few years ago now, so no, I don't think so."*

When talking specifically about the effect on the rest of the class, teachers again felt there was little or no negative effect. They didn't tend to mention any disruption to learning at all, but they did talk about the social effects. Generally they would seem to evaluate them, and conclude that children of this age just took it in their stride.

*"I don't think it has an impact on the rest of the class. Kids are very in your face, it's like here and if you are not there to talk to they will just talk to somebody else."*

*"No, not at all. I think probably we miss the little girl on a Friday when we're giving out the booklets. We go, [child's name]'s not here, and we do the register, Forest School, and we put them back in, but no, I don't think it has an effect. They notice that she's not there, but I think she's got quite a few friends, so it's not just one particular friend who might miss her. I don't think so."*

*"I think children just see it how it is. They don't tend to ask questions to be honest. They just get into a routine and it's just the norm that so and so is not there that specific day, and they just... yeah, that's it, that's the way our class runs."*

## **Missing out?**

When asked about the effects on the flexischooled child, the first thing teachers talked about was children potentially missing out in various ways. Missing out academically, i.e. missing parts of the curriculum, would seem to be an obvious worry, and most of our teachers discussed it as such, but then concluded that with the children they'd taught it wasn't, in practice, an issue.

*"I've not seen a difference in attainment in flexi-school children across our cluster."*

*"I think that it possibly could have an effect on their attainment, but it depends on how closely you work with the family to let them know."*

*"So, she wouldn't miss the teaching all week, but she would miss those assessments [on Friday]. Now, I think, depending on the ability of the child is how much impact that has. So far, I don't think it has had a great impact on the children that have been flexischooled, whether that's because of their ability or maybe their personalities, but I don't think it has."*

*"it tends to be the end of the week that flexi-schoolers have their days at home which, to be honest, works better I would say. We tend to do the more teacher input, the more teacher-led sort of experiences in lessons in the beginning of the week"*

One teacher did feel that with one student it had been an issue.

*"In my experience, and I'm thinking of a particular child, there was. I feel in the younger, sort of the very early levels of teacher input where they were learning phonics, they were learning the letter formations, there were obviously chunks of time of teacher input missing there.*

*When I got them sort of in the middle school, so like P3/4, it became apparent that there were things there that they hadn't picked up on."*

Teachers spent more time talking about the possibility of students missing out socially.

*"There are obviously negative sides, I think, and that would be I think along the social aspects of children, sort of dipping in and out of friendships. In my experience I've found that a flexi-school child can find it that bit more difficult to sort of fit back in to the social groupings, so week on week."*

*"I think that again can be a problem for a flexi-schooled child, that they weren't there yesterday so they went off and played with them and they played with them that day and then they're not there that day."*

*"I suppose it can affect social groups...."*

One teacher seemed to feel this was a significant problem and talked about it a lot. (This was the same teacher who thought it had impacted one of her students academically.)

One teacher felt that actually it wasn't really an issue with young primary aged children.

*"I haven't noticed that one day makes a difference, and I'm not the child, but I don't think so. In P2 I find that they have a group of friends and they move about still quite with the friendships....certainly, with the age range I teach, I've not noticed that that causes a problem with friendships or socially."*

Two teachers thought that on balance, although flexischooling presented social challenges for the child, it brought potential benefits, but would depend on the child.

*"Now, that said, it's what comes of that. If the child gets past that or overcomes that then it's resilience. If they don't, then it can feel excluding."*

One teacher in particular (our longest serving teacher, who had taught the most flexischooling students) had a lot to say on this, and we'll quote her thoughts at length:-

*"Sometimes a little bit more withdrawn in school because if the flexischooling has taken them out for bits, there are bits of the scenario that they don't know, it's a bit like missing out on a bit of a soap opera, you would have to play catch up, so you are doing*

*a lot of listening and they are very good at listening and tuning in to what's gone on and filling in gaps. I would say they are better at that because they have to.*

*They have got huge adaptability that often come from being the watcher in the playground, that just watches what's going on.*

*I think it's not to say it's bad because it's a different skillset to develop but I think it makes it harder.*

*I think these kids become very tough, they have a lot of resilience, and for some that works really well. For some who perhaps aren't as naturally resilient or as naturally good at building that resilience they find it even harder than they would have done otherwise. Really difficult."*

### **Do teachers see any benefits to flexischooling?**

In some cases, these discussions then led into the social effects for children of spending more time with their parents. Some teachers felt that the extra time with their parents, more one-to-one attention, and the fact that parents were taking a conscious interest in their child's education had positive effects for the child.

*"They tend to have a much more grown-up conversation and language set because they are exposed more to adults than they are to children therefore they have an adult sounding conversation, more confident with adults usually."*

*"you can tell the kids who've had time, somebody spending time sitting with them reading and following up at home, they gallop away, they are miles ahead, miles ahead, and it makes a huge difference."*

*"I think the children that I've taught that do have some flexischooling, they're quite... personalities and quite confident children, I think."*

*"a parent who is flexischooling is often much more engaged in the schooling process because they're wanting to coordinate or asking people what could their child be missing at that time. So, it can often lead to pretty open conversations with parents about the children's learning."*

But this depended on the quality of the parent/child relationship and how the parents behaved.

*"I think families can do a huge amount with their kids that adds on to school, so they don't have to lose anything, they add on to, and those are the kids that really, really, really win."*

*"having that capacity to then go home and say, "so and so was doing such and such and such and such", and because you generally have a very switched on group of parents them going, "oh well that could be because this, that could be because of that" and that sort of conjecture as to why it is or, "so and so punched me", "oh why do you think they might have done that", and the whole range of different reasons."*



*"it's not whether they're home-schooled, flexi-schooled or school-schooled, it's the competence of the adults in that child's environment that will actually help develop the outcomes."*

We didn't ask teachers this, but in most cases, teachers brought up parent's motivations for requesting flexischooling in our discussion, and the reasons they gave agreed broadly with what the parents said in our surveys – different settings and types of learning, more time with their families, school starting ages being too young, and the 'needs-led' reasons for children who are struggling with school for whatever reason.

*"No, I think certainly my children, and any children, they gain different experiences in different settings, and they benefit from multiple settings."*

*"For the most part, the reason why that's happening, is because parents are wanting to invest something more themselves with the children"*

*"the difference in reasons for people flexischooling are vast and I would say that in the UK for many it's a belief that actually schooling is starting too soon, that formal schooling is starting pre-7 which is perhaps not the European way, and I think that's a big thing, starting too soon."*

*Older ones that are being pulled out, quite often it's actually because the child's not happy in school or is felt not to be happy in school."*

*So I would say that there is probably only 5% have ever thought about it and of those 1 or 2% will be because they are not happy at school, and the other 3% will be because it's a very clear decision that they believe that there is a better balance between a formal education and what could be equally a formal education but of a different sort that is directly under parental control."*

*"you know, the system just doesn't work for some children. And if they are, those children who are going to benefit from it, then it can only be the right thing."*

One teacher talked about the way a parent could adapt teaching to the child, in a way that's not possible in school.

*"So, if I was doing multiplication, she was maybe doing it in a much more practical way, which helped that child as well because they learnt better that way. And, I said, I'd love to do that all the time, but with 27 it was just a bit trickier."*

In the main, three of the teachers seemed broadly supportive of flexischooling.

*"at the moment it just seems to be happening and it's okay. I don't feel it's disruptive to anybody and, therefore, it only seems beneficial."*

*"but I think if parents talk to the children and think that they're going to get the best of both worlds, it can only be a good thing."*

*"you just kind of think, well, if they can only access [forest school] until P3 anyway, why not because then, you know, they're not going to have that opportunity?"*

The fourth teacher didn't explicitly say she wasn't in favour of it, but she was the only one who didn't really articulate the reasons why parents might want to do it. And when talking about the effects on the child, she began by saying there were positives and negatives, but then talked about the positives in vague terms, but the negatives in very concrete terms.

*"I think there's obviously positives and negatives that go with it, that can occur with a flexi-school child. The positives being is that they obviously get more time at home to spend with their families, the families obviously made that decision together, hopefully talk to the child about it and it's hopefully their decision as well as the parents' decision. So, I think that it obviously is important to them as a family, and we are all for working together in partnership with parents. It's really, really important to me, as a teacher, that we work in close partnership, that we understand our families, we understand our children, and we understand what works best for our families.*

*There are obviously negative sides, I think, and that would be I think along the social aspects of children, sort of dipping in and out of friendships. With younger children particularly, friendships move so quickly, and in my experience I've found that a flexi-school child can find it that bit more difficult to sort of fit back in to the social groupings, so week on week. Sometimes, you find that there might be more squabbling because you've gone from maybe a pairing to a three, and a three's quite a tricky number for children to sort of manage socially. Also, of course, there's what they're not getting, as in teacher input in school and what they're then missing out on."*

This is the teacher mentioned above who felt the social and academic negative effects were significant.

She also made an interesting comment later on.

*"I think that you have to make sure that the way that you feel about flexischooling, whether it be negative or positive, doesn't come across to the child because at the end of the day that's their family that have decided to do that, and you have to be respectful of that."*

## **What are the barriers to flexischooling?**

Given that many flexischooling requests are turned down, but our teacher sample who have experienced it seem broadly supportive, what is the reason for that? Can we infer anything from the way these teachers talk about flexischooling?

Even though three out of four of our sample concluded that there were no real social or academic problems for most flexischooled children, they did spend a lot of time talking about them as a potential issue. And qualified it by saying that it depended on the child and the parents. The relationship between the parents and the school (and the child) was important.

*"It's more to do with that whole complicated dynamic between children's parents and school, I don't think it's the child itself, I think it's how does that whole package come together and work."*

So schools in general may be nervous about what the outcomes could be for a flexischooled child, when they have no control over what goes on out of the school.

When we asked teachers what advice they would give to other teachers about requests to flexischool, their answer was unanimous: communicate.

*"I would advise other teachers to have an open line of communication with the parents."*

*"My advice would be just communication and working with the parents and making sure meet the family."*

*"I think it has to be a very close relationship between the class teacher and the flexischooling parent."*

*"speak to the parents."*

Teachers would talk about co-ordinating with parents, so that parents could be covering the same content at home that the child was missing at school.

*"the family who are flexischooling, understanding the school timetable and what they might be missing, so that then the family could input that."*

*"That's where the partnership working with the parents and the school is really, really important because then the parents are aware of, right, today we're doing s-a-p, and these are the letters that you could be looking at in the environment."*

*"there's obviously lots and lots of things online now that could potentially help parents with aspects of the curriculum that they might not feel secure about."*

Whereas parents might not feel their aim on the home schooled days is to replicate school learning. There is perhaps a sense for some teachers that 'school is what learning looks like' and that's an assumption they find it hard to see past.

*"maybe it's me being a bit lazy or a bit busy, to actually it might be to see what the curriculum is at Forest School."*

Forest school principles are very child-led and play-based, and they don't have a curriculum in the sense it's used in mainstream schooling.

The default setting seems to be that missing bits of school is a problem that needs to be solved, rather than beginning from what the child can gain. Which is understandable given that the school bit is the teacher's responsibility, and what they put their time and energy into providing.

Teachers have considerable professional skills and training and some reflected that there might be some defensiveness from teachers when approached about flexischooling.

*"I think there's an element of being a little bit defensive in that, you know, a teacher is trying to do their absolute best for every child in their care and they believe that they are professional and able to do so well and there's somebody here saying, "but you're not good enough really because we're better than you", and there is that little bit of defensiveness I think that says, "what I can provide is really very, very good"*

*we are developed in the mould that says that we can provide something for children that is valuable and if you believe that then you are always going to be slightly protective thinking, 'yes, I can do this job possibly better than you'."*

*"you know, some teachers would take it well; some teachers wouldn't."*

One of the teachers has a primary aged child who flexischools, attending an informal forest school type group at a community woodland one day a week. There was an interesting moment in their interview where the interviewer asked them how many children flexischool at the school their child attends and they currently teach at (six), and then if there were any at the last school they taught at (none). The interviewer asked if they had any idea why there was the difference.

*"Yeah, to be perfectly honest with you when I was at [previous school] I did everything I could to try to make the kids want to come to school every day, not that I'd have been insulted if they didn't come to school, but that was my challenge anyways. So, yeah, that's why. It's got to be that. <laughter>"*

There was a sense here of the interviewee suddenly moving from the 'slightly alternative parent' perspective, to the classroom teacher's perspective, The classroom teacher's aim is to get kids coming to school every day, and successfully learning.

There seemed to be a general lack of guidance, and clarity on procedures around flexischooling.

*"This is the thing as well, we don't seem to have a lot of input, we just seem to say such a body is going to Forest School and being home schooled in the afternoon, and I've certainly not been greatly involved. But, I think something happens with the heads and the deputes. I don't know how it works."*

*"I thought I heard, one parent, as you know, come to an agreement and signed the contract, or whatever, but I don't know if that's the case for them all. But, certainly, I've not been part of any of that with the children I've taught so far."*

*"there's not necessarily, as you're aware, anything in place to give teachers advice as to how to handle this situation."*

Which will of course, impact how schools react to requests to flexischool.

## Discussion

It appears that teachers who have experience of flexischooling were clear and unanimous that it doesn't have a negative effect on them as teachers, or on the rest of the class. And broadly speaking, they don't see a negative effect on the child. Most of our teachers seemed generally supportive of flexischooling, although they had a lot to say about the possibility of missing out both socially and academically.

Schools are in a situation where for most there is a lack of clarity and guidance about flexischooling. They operate on the unconscious assumption that school is the best place for a child to learn. Particularly in schools without experience of flexischooling they fear the possibility of negative social and academic outcomes for the child. In the absence of any evidence that this won't be an issue, they operate on a precautionary principle, assuming that flexischooling *won't* be in the best interests of the child, and will tend to turn down requests.

Interestingly, all our teachers teach/taught in small rural primary schools and felt flexischooling doesn't happen in urban schools. Rural schools are often undersubscribed, so it is in the interests of headteachers to get as many children on the roll as they can. Whereas many urban schools will be very oversubscribed and schools can effectively pick and chose. Perhaps the reason flexischooling is more common in rural schools is simply that the balance of power between parents and schools is different there, and there's a reason for schools to set aside their precautionary principle and agree a flexischooling request.

## Overall discussion - bringing the three strands together

The overall result of our evidence shows that flexischooling is a significant and growing issue in Scotland, with both teachers and parents broadly seeing a variety of benefits and limited drawbacks.

Comparing the teacher interviews and the parent surveys gives an interesting insight into where these two perspectives converge and diverge. Teachers focussed more on what children might be missing out on at school, such as social interaction and the potential for missing elements of the curriculum. Whereas parents focussed more on what children might be gaining, such as more time outdoors, reduced stress, broader educational experiences, and improved relationships with peers, family and institutions. Teachers assumed parents would focus on curriculum but no parents said they did.

Both recognised the significant benefits of parents having a greater involvement in their child's education. Parents felt empowered by this and that they were being led by their children's interests. Teachers described those children whose parents spent time engaged in their education as being ahead academically, and more confident. Significantly, the majority of the data from parents, and all the data from teachers related to Primary aged children and may not be transferable into Secondary School. The

FOI data, however, indicated a slightly greater incidence of flexischooling in Secondary aged children than Primary aged children.

Both parents and teachers shared concerns regarding children missing out socially. However some parents noticed the benefits of broadening children's social experience by being involved in activities such as Forest School. Similarly, teachers downplayed social exclusion in practice, noticing instead, a social resilience in flexischooled children as a result of learning to be more adaptable.

Parents perceived a negative effect on teachers workload but teachers stated none. Both parents and teachers stressed the need for good communication and a partnership between schools and parents. It was felt that flexischooling parents were often more engaged in their child's learning and that this had a positive effect on children, and on the relationship between families and schools. There was some evidence from parents that this led them to have a greater involvement in their children's schools.

The lack of clarity and confusion about flexischooling policy which the FOI results reveal is echoed by teachers, and could be one reason why flexischooling requests are often turned down. Only one parent said they found out about flexischooling from the school. Many parents also referred to bravery or courage when asked what their advice would be to other parents, rather than to legislation, which indicates inconsistency of policy and a sense of pioneering spirit felt in each case. This was backed up in the FOI results by the lack of consistency about what is considered as flexischooling, even what term is used to describe part time schooling, whether ASL pupils are counted in their flexischooling numbers, what policies local authorities have relating to it, and who has responsibility for flexischooling within each local authority.

Both teachers and parents are operating somewhat in the dark in most local authorities. Given this lack of structural information or guidance, teachers and heads need to make up mental models around flexischooling, which may focus on risk management rather than the potential benefits to children and families. This is particularly concerning as the FOI requests indicated an increase in the numbers of flexischooling requests over recent years. Our evidence points to the lack of clarity and consistency in statutory guidance causing additional stress both to families and schools.

In relation to ASL needs, our evidence showed a mixed picture in comparison to the national figures. ASL pupils make up 24% of the Scottish school roll. Only 20% of the children represented in our parent survey were identified as having ASL need. However, our survey figures were relatively small and our sampling method not carefully designed to get a representative cross section as this was a qualitative rather than quantitative study. The FOI results indicated 35% of flexischooled children with ASL needs. Although the FOI figures may undercount because some ASL pupils will be in school part time without being recorded as flexischooling. As we did not ask teachers about any ASL needs we do not know how their experience relates to this evidence. It is clear from our data that children with ASL needs represent a significant proportion of flexischooling children, probably over-represented in comparison to the national school roll. Additionally, our parent survey would indicate, that they access flexischooling later in their schooling and possibly continue until they are older.

The evidence we gained from both parents and teachers indicated that flexischooling enabled a bespoke and child centred arrangement for pupils which fits well into the

Scottish policy of Getting It Right For Every Child, relating to most of the wellbeing indicators. The FOI data showed small but significant and potentially growing numbers of flexischooling pupils in Scotland. Both of these factors warrant further research in this area.

### **Suggested future research:-**

Talk to the children, what is their experience?

Talk to more teachers. Deliberately talk to teachers in Fife and Argyll and Hollinsclough School in England, as well as other places - are teachers views or experiences different when they are in a flexischooling-supportive setting?

Talk to staff at Fife and Argyll Councils about how they manage their flexible learning approach, what they've learned, and what challenges and benefits they have found.

Talk to teachers with no flexischooling experience and compare. Get clearer insight into what might be making schools say no.

Talk to SLT's/Heads as they presumably are the ones who say yes or no.

Further explore the special case of ASL needs children who flexischool.

The parent and teacher data in our study almost exclusively relates to primary aged children. It would be interesting to do similar research around flexischooling in secondary.

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## Appendix

### FOI Requests

Full text of FOI request sent to all 32 local authorities in Scotland, using the website <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/>

#### FLEXISCHOOLING POLICY

1. Flexischooling is defined by the Scottish government as where a child attends school part-time and is home educated for the remainder of the week, and can be arranged in collaboration with the school and parents. More information is available here: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2007/12/17133313/3>

Does <Insert LA name> use the term flexischooling to refer to this arrangement, or is it known by a different term?

2. Please send us copies of written information that <insert LA name> makes available to staff, schools or parents to guide and support;

- a. requesting a flexischooling arrangement,
- b. the decision-making process in accepting or rejecting a request
- c. the ongoing support for schools and families involved in flexischooling.

This might include, but not be limited to, policies, procedures and information/guidance sheets.

3. If you do not have any written information as described above, please tell us how a request for a new flexischooling arrangement would be dealt with.

4. Which role within <insert LA name> has responsibility for flexischooling? What are their responsibilities? Please provide us with the contact details (name, email, phone number) of the person who currently holds this role.

#### FLEXISCHOOLING NUMBERS



1. How many children do you believe are currently flexischooling? Please tell us how you calculated this number (eg based on requests for arrangements, headteacher reports, registration codes).
2. Please provide a breakdown of these numbers indicating the phase of schooling ie number at primary (5-11) level, number at secondary (11-18) level.
3. How many flexischooled children are known to require Additional Support for Learning (ASL).
4. How many requests have been made for flexischooling arrangements during the academic years;
  - a) 2014-15
  - b) 2015-16
  - c) 2016-17
5. How many requests in each of those time periods were accepted?
6. How many requests in each of those time periods were refused. Please give a breakdown of the reasons for which they were refused.

## Parent survey text

How many children do you have flexischooling?

What age are your flexischooling children?

At what point did they start flexischooling?

At start of schooling

In Primary (what year)

In Secondary (what year)

How did you find out about flexischooling?

Friends

Family

School

Other educational professional

Health professional

Press

Social media

No-one, made it up myself

Other (please specify)

Why did you decide to flexi-school?

Do you feel flexischooling had an effect on your child's

Education

Social confidence

Wellbeing

Attitude to school

Yes, negatively. No, not at all. Yes, positively

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

What are the benefits of flexischooling for your child?

What are the drawbacks of flexischooling for your child?

What do you think has been the effect on family life?

What was the process of arranging it with the school? (Tick all that apply)

Request to Head Teacher

Request to Educational Authority

Informal arrangement

Contract

Result of a Child's Planning Meeting

Regular meetings with class teacher

Regular contact with school regarding learning

No arrangement in place

Other (please specify)

Has this arrangement changed over time? If so, why?

What is the ratio of time at school and not at school?

How supportive do you feel the school have been?

Very unsupportive. Neither. Very supportive.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

What do you do with your HS time?

(Tick all that apply)

Follow school curriculum

Do homework

Parent planned learning

Alternative teaching (eg. Forest School, music lessons)

Free play

Learning led by child's interests

Therapy (talking or physical)

Educational outings (eg. Museums, concerts)

Meeting additional needs unmet at school (please specify)

Other (please specify)

What advice would you give to other families considering flexischooling?

Do you consider your child to have additional support needs? y/n

If so, what do you consider them to be?

## Teacher interview prompt questions

Closed questions:

Do you teach in a primary or secondary setting?

How many flexi-schoolers have you taught?

Over how many years?

How big is your school?

How big is your class?

How many pupils currently flexi-school in your class/school?

Open questions:

What has been the effect on the flexischooled child?

What has been the effect on the rest of the class?

What advice would you give another teacher about it?

What advice would you give to parents who are considering flexischooling?