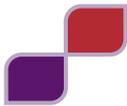


New models for organising education: 'Flexi-schooling' – how one school does it well

Guidance report

Paul Gutherson
Janette Mountford-Lees



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Welcome to Hollinsclough C of E (VA) Primary School

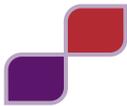
Hollinsclough School aims to serve the pupils, their families and the community. It believes that every member of the school community is important and that all can learn from each other. The school provides a safe, secure and caring community, where staff and parents work together to ensure that the children receive an excellent education and achieve their best. Hollinsclough Primary School has for some time offered part-time or flexi-schooling for a number of home schooling families.

The School is set within the Peak District National Park, close to the foot of Chrome Hill. Falling numbers of pupils, with the school roll at one point down to only five children, threatened the viability of the school and its considerable contribution to the life of the community it serves.



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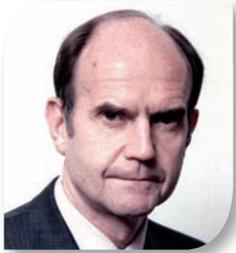
About the report

This report is split into three parts. It can be read as one document, or you may prefer just to read the part that is of most interest to you.

Part 1 is the story of Hollinsclough School. The story is told by the headteacher, by the local authority, and by the parents of the pupils attending the school.

Part 2 provides a guide for readers considering adopting flexi-school approaches themselves. This includes the principles that need to be established, and a range of key issues that need to be considered.

Part 3 documents the evidence that exists for a flexi-school approach. It has been written following a Rapid Evidence Review methodology and draws on literature and studies from around the world.



Foreword by Sir Jim Rose

‘Flexi-schooling’ or ‘flexible school attendance’ is an arrangement between the parent and the school where the child is registered at school in the normal way but where the child attends the school only part time; the rest of the time the child is home-educated (effectively on authorised absence from school). Flexi-schooling is a legal option provided that the headteacher at the school concerned agrees to the arrangement.

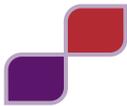
Home schooling is a long-standing option that is open to parents who, for example, take the view that their children are not always best served by entering full-time, statutory education at the age of five. Some parents prefer to educate their children full time at home while others seek varying periods of part-time schooling, irrespective of their child’s age.

The purpose of this report is not to argue for or against home schooling but to describe the provision and practice of a small school where an approach to ‘flexi-schooling’ is widely acknowledged as successfully meeting parents’ wishes and children’s educational needs. Its innovative flexi-school approach enables a mix of parent-led educational activities to blend with school-based educational activities.

The report does not provide a blueprint for others to follow; it is simply a story of one school’s approach to flexi-schooling and the benefits to children and parents that have stemmed from it. The hope is that this will be a helpful narrative which sets out some of the issues for parents, headteachers, governors and local authorities to consider, should they wish to offer the option of flexi-schooling in like circumstances.

Sir Jim Rose

Trustee and Chairman of the education committee
CfBT Education Trust



Background

Hollinsclough is a small, Church of England, Voluntary-aided primary school which serves a rural area within the Peak District National Park. The school is organised as two classes: one is for reception age children and those in Years 1 and 2; the other is for children in Years 3 to 6. It also offers a pre-school facility called 'Little Berries' for children from 2 years of age. The school provides wider community support, hosting an informal carer and toddler group which meets on one morning a week, a weekly yoga class, an after-school maths club and a monthly family film club. Additionally the school has become the 'village office', providing photocopying and internet facilities. It has developed links with a local high school in Buxton (St Thomas More) and has hosted an adult family learning programme leading to English and mathematics qualifications. The school has gained the Healthy Schools and Active Schools awards and the foundation status of the School's International Award; it is working towards the Eco Schools Bronze Award and aims to gain Forest School status. It has also achieved recognition as a 'dyslexia friendly school'.

Parents who wish to educate their children partly at home and partly at school are encouraged to take advantage of the arrangements for 'flexi-schooling' introduced by the headteacher when she was appointed two years ago.

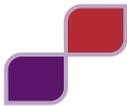
An Ofsted Inspection in March 2010 reported: *'Within the school's very friendly, secure, calm and intimate family ethos, pupils achieve well and make good progress academically and in their personal development. Pupils behave and look after each other exceptionally well. They feel especially safe, and are very confident in the adults, who they regard as 'kind'. Staff know the pupils extremely well and this provides the foundation for the outstanding care, guidance and support that the school provides for its pupils... Pupils make good progress because of the effective combination of formal, informal and one-to-one teaching.'*

Though judged by Ofsted to be a good school, falling numbers, at one point down to only five children, threatened its viability and a lessening contribution to community life. Spare capacity in the school has been turned to advantage by introducing 'flexi-schooling' which, among other gains, has attracted children from a wider area than previously. Though still a small school, the numbers on roll have risen to twelve full-time pupils plus twelve flexi-schooled pupils.

This report describes and comments on how Hollinsclough has supported 'flexi-schooling', an approach to education which offers to parents, some of whom wish to educate their children at home, opportunities for part-time attendance at the school. The headteacher describes the approach as follows:

Our broad and balanced curriculum, together with high quality teaching, equips pupils with worthwhile knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes and values. The approach fosters a life-long love of learning, in an atmosphere where pupils, parents and teachers can effectively work together to enhance education for all. The Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling enables parents to adopt one of three options that best suits their children's needs:

- **Option 1** – Full-time education within statutory guidelines
- **Option 2** – Part-time education, where the child comes on agreed days, wears school uniform, and joins in with timetabled opportunities for that day
- **Option 3** – Children and parents/carers come to a 'Learning Hub' at least once every two weeks, for an education surgery, show and tell opportunities or an activity.



Part 1: The story of Hollinsclough School

The fear was that the school would no longer be deemed viable – a big blow for the village and the local community.

The school's story

Our interest in the flexi-school approach began at a time when we had falling numbers at Hollinsclough: at one point we only had five children on the roll. The fear was that the school would no longer be deemed viable – a big blow for the village and the local community. During this time we had an enquiry from a parent who home-schooled her children, asking if we would consider part-time education for her children as she had difficulty finding a school that would agree to this. The idea seemed to fit with Hollinsclough's approach to inclusive education and with the support of the then Director of Education for Staffordshire we began to investigate the possibilities of flexi-schooling.

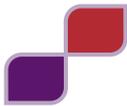
We believe that education should be tailored to the needs of each child, and responsive to their different but developing abilities, irrespective of their age. One of the advantages of such a small school is that we get to know each child and their family to a depth that may not be possible in a larger school. This means we can give each child a personalised learning plan with all the advantages of, for example, one-to-one tuition as well as participation in group work and whole class teaching. We felt that we could develop a working partnership with parents who electively home-school their children but still seek some support from the school system. We value the support of parents and members of the community who have the requisite skills, to help us enrich the curriculum. We therefore developed an approach which provides:

- **mutual support** – an opportunity for those who choose to educate at home to come together and receive additional support through sharing best practice
- **enhanced social development** – opportunities for children who may be educated on their own at home to mix on a regular basis for learning and interacting with other children
- **dynamic teaching and learning** – opportunities for mutual enrichment and exchange of ideas through a learning community of children, staff and parents in which there is ongoing dialogue about key aspects of teaching and learning that are evidence based.

A flexi-school approach, we believed, would bring financial benefits, shared ideas and shared resources. We wanted to offer a real alternative to parents through a more flexible approach to education that embraced and supported those parents and children who had made this choice but were uncertain about the legalities and practicalities of offering flexi-schooling.

We had some concerns about adding to the workload of our staff; for example, rigorous planning for, and assessing, continuity and progression of learning are crucial factors in achieving successful outcomes for each child. Organisational and timetabling difficulties had to be resolved; for example, many of our flexi-schooled children come from quite a distance and sometimes arrive late to school; some children may feel left out or marginalised if they miss events such as educational visits and birthdays. We were also concerned to ensure that children who attend full time did not feel 'hard-done-by'.

The intake of pupils has more than quadrupled in three years. The immediate impact has been a rush of interest and support from parents who home-educate their children but still want links with or support from a school. There are clear benefits to the small group of children who are full-time pupils of the school in that they have other children from a variety of backgrounds to socialise and



The school is continuing to adapt its processes and curriculum to ensure that the needs of all families attending the school are appropriately met.

work with. We have pupils who previously refused school, coming into this school consistently for one or two days a week.

The Learning Hub (option 3) had its first meeting in January 2011, and was very well received, with over 20 parents and children attending. More enquiries about the Learning Hub are being taken weekly. Within our Learning Hub are some children who had never been into a school before and were surprised to find that they enjoyed the experience. Parents, too, were surprised, as their children who had formerly refused to attend school, now looked forward to the next session, and one parent has started an online group.

The school hoped that children coming to the hub would sign up to the full flexi-schooling programme. However, so far, these parents seem to prefer to make a financial contribution to the hub rather than 'going onto the system'. They really like the idea of borrowing books and other resources, and one parent has taken responsibility for developing the loan system. The indications are that these parents are beginning to see flexi-schooling as a viable alternative to full-time education.

The school is continuing to adapt its processes and curriculum to ensure that the needs of all families attending the school are appropriately met. We must also demonstrate that the Learning Hub can be financially sustainable. The school is keen to build on its experience and knowledge to date in order to develop flexi-schooling in partnership with local secondary schools, to ensure progression. The school has already made links with two secondary schools, one in Staffordshire and one in Derbyshire. The model under consideration is that children register with the secondary school, but work in the Hollinsclough hub, with an outreach worker from the secondary school supporting the child at regular intervals. The school is exploring becoming a registered examination centre for GCSEs.

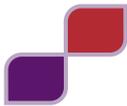
The local authority's story

Staffordshire local authority recognised that the approach could become a model for other schools, although the criteria for success would not make it an option for all schools. This is believed to be the only school in the country at the moment attempting to take this approach seriously and to overcome the many barriers to effective flexi-schooling. The local authority agreed to the school undertaking a pilot project during the year 2010–11 to see if the flexi-school idea could be a realistic and sustainable option for Hollinsclough. The key issue for the school and the local authority is whether there will be enough take-up of places to give the school a sustainable future in terms of funding.

Hollinsclough is unique as a setting, with small numbers of full-time students in a very rural community. The small numbers and the setting make it possible for the school to accommodate children who are being home-schooled and to offer some alternative educational provision in a specially devised curriculum.

The school has attracted a great deal of interest in its ethos and approach from parents who want a particular type of education for their children. The school has already gained more full-time pupils, some of whom were previously home-educated, and it may be that this profile can make the school sustainable in terms of numbers of pupils for the future.

A number of home-schooled children now attend the school part time, as part of their education. The school offers parents some options, according to their particular needs in supporting their children's education. Some children attend for the basic national curriculum and will take the usual



Flexi-schooling is a legitimate way of educating children and young people and recognises that there are 'win-win' opportunities for all.

SATs. Others attend for a more creative curriculum option which develops cross-curricular skills, knowledge and understanding. This also allows them to mix with other children to develop the personal, social and emotional aspects of their learning.

We are now aware of a number of home-educating families who are not registered with the local authority. Families that are registered gain support from the local authority and from the network of families who work in this way. We feel that all children, wherever they are educated in Staffordshire, should be known to the local authority, both for safeguarding purposes and to ensure they are receiving their entitlement to good quality educational provision.

Some useful lessons have been learned. There has been some very creative thinking about how education can be delivered differently, and this is very much in line with the current political thinking on educational provision. This creative thinking has been necessary to ensure some of the barriers to flexi-schooling could be overcome, for example finding a registration code that recognises the flexi-school attendance, gaining access to information on home-schooling and the needs of parents and children, devising a contract that is acceptable to all parties and working out curriculum and safeguarding issues.

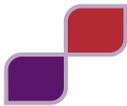
Flexi-schooling is a legitimate way of educating children and young people and recognises that there are 'win-win' opportunities for all. It can help develop effective partnerships between schools and parents. When learning is planned together with other stakeholders it has increased potential to 'stick with the child' although it does require agreements which recognise and celebrate personalised learning. It is vital that the headteacher and governors are committed to the flexi-school concept and the school is able to accommodate flexible approaches. Parents need to be equally committed to the approach and to work together and in partnership with the headteacher and governors to ensure that their children actively participate. Finally it is essential that a review is undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of flexi-schooling and an exit strategy is in place should it not achieve its aims.

The parents' story

All of us have different reasons for choosing this path; some parents choose to home-educate their children as they have experienced education systems in other countries which they feel differ significantly from mainstream education in the UK, others because they hold strong beliefs about 'personalising' education to fit their children's different but developing abilities and dispositions. However, work or family commitments can make home-schooling difficult and the opportunity to 'share educational responsibility' with a school may appear attractive. For other families the opportunity to access a wider variety of activities than they themselves can offer, or recognition that the social interaction afforded by time in school can be a positive experience for their child has driven their interest in flexi-schooling. For yet others flexi-schooling provides an opportunity for the child to be part of the 'education system' in readiness for them to access full-time schooling in the future.

Despite the fact that Hollinsclough is a small school with a distinct ethos of inclusive learning, some home-schooled children and their families can experience difficulties adjusting or bridging the two systems. The learning hub option at Hollinsclough may ease this period of adjustment as it is more parent and child led than the part-time schooling option, thus allowing a phased/managed transition to part-time schooling for those who decide to take advantage of that option.

The relationship between parents and teaching staff at Hollinsclough feels different from that between a teacher and the parents of full-time pupils. There is more of a sense of being a team, of

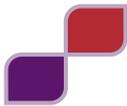


Good quality flexi-schooling adds this dimension to the creative thinking, problem-solving and self-management skills that are typically well developed in home-schooled children.

being jointly responsible for the education of the child. Thus parent participation in the education process is more meaningful and feels like ‘real partnership’.

Some of us feel that academic gains are one of several major benefits for our children. Other significant benefits include social development, participation and enjoyment of team sports and variety of experience. Some focus on the importance of beginning to acquire specific bodies of knowledge and to be comfortable in ‘test’ situations as a child progresses through education. Good quality flexi-schooling adds this dimension to the creative thinking, problem-solving and self-management skills that are typically well developed in home-schooled children.

There are also potential benefits to siblings of home-schooled children. A flexi-school can offer increased flexibility within a home-educated environment. One child can experience collaborative work in a formal setting, whilst her sibling can spend more focused time at home with individual work. Siblings can pursue different interests more easily. Attending school part time or occasionally can allow less socially-confident children the opportunity to work with others at a pace that suits them.



Part 2: A short guide for those considering flexi-school approaches

Hollinsclough believes that education should be tailored to the needs of each child and that each child should be able to develop at an appropriate pace...

This short guide is based on the key concerns identified by stakeholders during the development of the Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling. It is not a step-by-step guide to establishing a flexi-school approach; rather it takes the form of a list of questions a school might need to consider in order to develop a flexi-school offer. Every school will want to develop its own principles underpinning the rationale for initiating flexi-schooling, based on the ethos and context of the school. The guiding principles and rationale for Hollinsclough are given below as an example.

The Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling: rationale

Most families and children are quite happy and do well in the traditional structure of state schooling; however, there are exceptions. There are those children who have been emotionally bruised by their experience of school. There are others whose parents are unhappy with the constraints of a national programme of learning. There are yet others with particular talents or interests who may want more time spent outside school to nurture them but who would also value some time in a school setting.

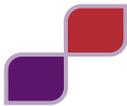
Hollinsclough believes that education should be tailored to the needs of each child and that each child should be able to develop at an appropriate pace, and access any level of education whatever his or her age. Accordingly, each child at Hollinsclough has a personalised learning plan, and the advantage of as much individual tuition as is needed. We welcome the support of parents and members of the community who have skills to help us enrich the curriculum. The learning programme is designed to accommodate a child's interests and enthusiasms which help motivate the child, ensuring that learning is a pleasurable and stimulating experience. The overall programme of learning requires a balance between the different areas of content, concepts and skills, but can be flexible about day-to-day timing, allowing the school to respond to the needs of the child and to opportunities that arise during learning.

The school offers a flexible approach to education that encompasses and supports those children who are home-educated and those who have been emotionally bruised by their experiences in a large primary or secondary school. This approach provides mutual support, enhanced social development and dynamic teaching and learning. The Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling enables parents to select one of three options that best suits their needs:

- **Option 1** – full-time education within statutory guidelines
- **Option 2** – part-time education, where the child comes on agreed days, wears school uniform, and joins in with timetabled opportunities for that day
- **Option 3** – children and parents/carers come to a 'Learning Hub' at least once every two weeks for an education surgery, show and tell opportunities, or an activity day.

Principles

1. School organisation must be based on identified need.
2. School organisation must be led by needs of *all* learners and their families (i.e. must ensure there is no detrimental effect on pupils within school who attend full time).



3. Flexi-school parents must be part of the formal school governance structure.
4. The approach must enable mutual support, social experience and dynamic learning for all children and parents attending the school.

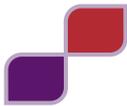
Key considerations

There are a number of key considerations that the headteacher and governors of Hollinsclough had to address in developing its model of flexi-schooling. It is likely that any school considering introducing a flexi-schooling approach will need to think about similar issues, but the response may well differ as most of the issues are contextually dependent. See below.

Considerations	Questions to ask yourself
1. Identifying need	<p>Q. Is there a 'market'? How many home-schooling families are there in a 10-mile/20-mile/50-mile radius?</p> <p>Q. What do those families want/expect from a school? Why do they home-school? Is part-time attendance attractive to them? In what form? At what times?</p> <p>Q. Are there families whose children are currently full-time pupils who would want to take up a part-time offer? Would this have negative consequences?</p> <p>Q. Are any other local schools providing a similar offer?</p>
2. Resources and funding	<p>Q. What level of funding will your local authority provide for part-time pupils?</p> <p>Q. What implications will there be for staffing? Will flexi-school families volunteer to help deliver some services and/or support learning in school?</p> <p>Q. Who will have responsibility for building and maintaining relationships with flexi-school families?</p> <p>Q. What impact will it have on school support staff?</p> <p>Q. Will the funding model be based on mixed sources of income? Consider paid for services, grant making trusts etc.</p>
3. Curriculum design and delivery	<p>Q. Does your curriculum match the identified learning needs of potential flexi-school families?</p> <p>Q. Do you need to adjust timetabling to accommodate the 'domestic' arrangements of potential flexi-school families?</p> <p>Q. Will you need to define 'core' or 'foundation' subjects and timetable accordingly?</p> <p>Q. How can individual learning plans be used to ensure appropriate learning and continuity of learning?</p> <p>Q. Are there staffing implications? Can families and community members enrich the curriculum?</p> <p>Q. Will partnerships with other learning providers be useful?</p>



4. Assessment and accreditation	<p>Q. How will you share information and assess work? Will the same approach be used for full-time and part-time pupils?</p> <p>Q. If you use a portfolio or record of achievement, what work or evidence can be included? Can it include audio and video evidence? Will an e-portfolio be appropriate?</p> <p>Q. Will all children be able to access the school assessment system (Assessing Pupil Progress), Assessment for Learning and diagnostic testing?</p> <p>Q. Will all children be able to access SEN support through the school?</p> <p>Q. Will all children be able to take SATs?</p> <p>Q. What are the information needs of receiving schools?</p>
5. Professional development needs	<p>Q. How can you ensure staff have the skills and confidence to cope with the flexibility required by this approach?</p>
6. Governance	<p>Q. Does the approach fit your school development plan?</p> <p>Q. Are the headteacher and all governors supportive of the concept?</p> <p>Q. Does it require changes to your governance documents or structures (e.g. an additional governor)?</p> <p>Q. What might the impact on school cohesion be?</p>
7. Systemic and legal issues	<p>Q. Will you need a ‘contract’ with families of flexi-schooled pupils to ensure roles and responsibilities are clearly understood?</p> <p>Q. What is your local authority’s view on how frequently the school must see children to meet Child Protection/Safeguarding obligations?</p>
8. Measuring performance/ impact	<p>Q. What does a successful flexi-school look like? What will the measurable outcomes be for pupils and families? For the school? For the local authority? Are they different for part-time and full-time pupils?</p>



Part 3: Rapid Evidence Review

Other estimates suggest that there may be as many as 150,000 children currently being educated at home...

This Rapid Evidence Review (RER) was undertaken as part of the Design and Research project to establish a model for flexi-schooling. The RER aims to cover issues identified by the project advisory group as potentially significant obstacles and issues that must be overcome or addressed in order to establish a successful flexi-school. These issues are set out in Box 1. It is not a comprehensive or exhaustive review of the literature. It covers UK and international examples of policy development, research into and guidance for developing and supporting alternative models of delivering education, elective home education, non-formal education and virtual schooling. Its focus is on the systems, processes and structures required to establish a workable model of flexi-schooling that meets both statutory requirements and the needs of parents and the young people themselves. The RER does not focus on the relative merits and disadvantages of home-schooling, the effectiveness of home-schooling, or the reasons underlying the decision to home-school or opt out of mainstream schooling.

Box 1: Key issues when designing the flexi-school model

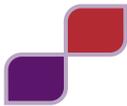
- Systemic and legal issues – register codes, safeguarding
- Determining an appropriate offer/curriculum
- Parental needs and engagement
- School/home agreements
- Assessment and accreditation of progress
- Resources and funding
- Professional development requirements
- Virtual learning environments
- Access to specialist services and support
- Identifying partners and commissioning additional offer

Why is developing a flexi-school model important?

There is growing interest in home educators in the UK and internationally. Government research into the number of home educators in the UK suggests that there are somewhere between 35,000 and 50,000 young people being educated at home. This is a considerable number of young people (though only a small percentage of the total population of children and young people – approximately 1%). Other estimates suggest that there may be as many as 150,000 children currently being educated at home, and this number is predicted to rise by 3% per year.¹ SigmaScan² suggests that the number of parents choosing to educate their children at home could increase substantially, reaching 350,000 pupils in ten years. If this were to happen the need for improved systems of support for home-schooling families would be likely to increase. The value of support groups to home-educators is emphasised in Atkinson *et al* (2006). Though their study is based on a small sample of only 20 home-educating families, they note that contact with other home-educating families provided an important opportunity to share knowledge and experiences and was an important source of information and ideas as well as access to organised activities. Similarly Barson (2004) quotes from a number of research studies in America including one survey of 1500 home-educated students, in which 85% attended a support group or intended to join one, and

¹ <http://www.oxfordhomeschooling.co.uk/?gclid=Claxpc3YmZUCFQ9KQgodq37rgw>

² The Office of Science and Innovation commissioned work published via SigmaScan, a horizon scanning programme provided by the Outsights-MORI partnership www.sigmascan.org



'Flexi-schooling' is a legal option provided that the headteacher at the school concerned agrees to the arrangement.

another study which chronicles 21 home-educating families of which 15 mentioned using a support group. Three of these were internet-based support networks and five were co-operatives. Reilly *et al* (2002) highlight the importance of support networks for home educators in Australia as a source of 'encouragement and verification' which increases parents' confidence in their ability to manage the process. The Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling aims to provide access to a support network of like-minded families as well as educational 'expertise'.

A number of authors question the suitability of current educational delivery models and see a growing demand for alternative models of delivery, such as virtual schools, driven at least in part by fundamental changes in our society and the students who inhabit it. 'As ubiquitous communications and immediate access to information have become more common, learners recognise that learning can be an anytime-anywhere experience. They want educational opportunities that reflect these characteristics' (Davis & Roblyer, 2005). In addition, the coalition government's plans for schools open up the way for new innovative structures for schools including parent-led schools and innovative approaches to curriculum design and delivery. In an era of reduced public funding, flexi-schooling, all-age learning hubs, parent-led co-operatives and other models of school organisation may provide models for sustainable small community schools.

Furthermore there is scope for more localised forms of schooling. The coalition government's Free Schools policy allows 'the creation of new educational institutions within the state-funded sector – each of them an individual reflection of the character and needs of their local communities.' This clearly opens the door for new forms of 'schooling' if based on the needs of a specific community, and the case for flexi-schooling may be strengthened further through powers in the Localism Bill, namely:

- the 'General Power of Competence' which gives local authorities the freedom to 'do anything which is not specifically prohibited by law'
- the 'right to do things differently in different places'
- suggestions that the delivery model (process) for public services is less important than the achievement of the desired outcomes.

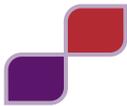
Flexi-schooling – the concept

The flexi-schooling concept builds on the view identified by Rothermel (2002) that 'There was a sense of families searching out an ideal that was not home and not school but some midway alternative.'

Leicestershire County Council (2008) provides a legal definition of flexi-schooling or flexible school attendance as:

'an arrangement between the parent and the school where the child is registered at school and attends the school only part time; the rest of the time the child is home educated (on authorised absence from school). This can be a long-term arrangement or a short-term measure for a particular reason. "Flexi-schooling" is a legal option provided that the headteacher at the school concerned agrees to the arrangement. The child will be required to follow the National Curriculum whilst at school but not whilst he or she is being educated at home.'

In some ways this does not differ significantly from Rothermel's (2002) description of home-schooling: 'It is not an education that happens at home because so much of it happens outside the home. All that can really be said of it in this respect is that it is an education that does not take place wholly



...the provision of high-quality specialist tuition for a few hours per week for home-schooling families...

within a school (although many children go into schools for after-school classes) and that is not subject to the regulations, aged-based learning goals and testing regimes that schools involve.'

One useful description of how flexi-schooling might actually be organised suggests flexi-schooling would:

'involve parents being able to choose what days and how many hours per day their children went to school; parents and children being able to pick specific courses that they wanted to attend; parents attending lessons with their children; the provision of high-quality specialist tuition for a few hours per week for home-schooling families and providing specialist facilities – such as libraries, laboratories, computers, sports facilities and gardens – for children that are not in full-time school.'

(freedom-in-education.co.uk)

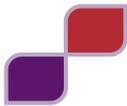
This description is closest to the vision of flexi-schooling held by Hollinsclough School and would appear to be a commonsense approach for organising education. It also reflects a model of education that Brabant (2007) refers to as the 'educational village', building on the African proverb that 'it takes a village to raise a child'. Brabant notes that this concept 'suggests cooperation' or even 'interdependence' between 'villagers'. Epstein (2005) places this notion in a more theoretical context – the theory of overlapping spheres. 'By focusing attention on the importance of home, school and community as the major contexts in which students develop, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence helps connect ideas about teaching, shared leadership, and student learning.' Both Epstein and Brabant's ideas, however, leave many unanswered questions that also reflect the issues that flexi-schooling needs to address, for example 'Who makes the decisions?' 'Who coordinates the tasks?' 'Where and with whom does the child spend most of his/her days?' 'Does the child have a say in this?'

Some authors argue that this collaborative approach to education may be well suited to the future demands of a knowledge economy. Doblar (2009) notes that we live in a world where 'everything is customised to suit our wants and needs...except school.' By and large, school still reflects the standardised 'factory model' that suited life one hundred years ago and as Robinson (2010) noted in his RSA lecture, the problem with education is that countries are 'trying to meet the future by doing what they did in the past and in the process are alienating millions of kids who don't see any purpose in going to school'. Russell (2005) notes that a number of authors have reflected on perceived shortcomings of traditional pedagogical models and that this has led them to suggest:

- the knowledge economy is less suited for whole-class instruction, because it is unsuited to the required creativity, collaboration and self-management
- the continuance of industrial-era schools is reminiscent of industrial-age factories, where there was passive knowledge transfer, and an unquestioning requirement to complete assigned tasks
- schools can be characterised by their centralised curricula, insufficient autonomy, and excessive control.

Thus, Russell asks, should we now be looking to a post-industrial or post-modern concept of education that includes increased responsibility for individual teachers, parents and schools, and the reduction of central bureaucracies?

The sense that the current education systems are not up to the challenges of the 21st century are further examined by John Daniel in *Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers, Achieving Education for All* (2010) as he observes that 'education in the 21st century requires more emphasis



Although conceived on a global scale the principles of combining distance learning, community support and using technology are relevant to flexi-schooling.

on learning and less on teaching'. In his book, Daniel describes a future where 30 million children worldwide will not be attending primary school in 2015 and there will be a shortfall of over 10 million teachers in the next five years. Daniel's solution is 'Open Schools', which use ICT to offer courses synchronously to scattered populations. He envisages Open Schools with 10,000 students being feasible through the innovative use of technology. Such schools already exist in some countries. Although conceived on a global scale the principles of combining distance learning, community support and using technology are relevant to flexi-schooling.

Flexi-schooling – borrowing from other forms of school organisation

Part of the rationale underpinning our interest in the flexi-school approach is a desire to question whether current forms of school organisation are relevant to the 21st century. We are not alone in this and it is not new. Doblar (2009) draws attention to the principles set out in 1994 by Charles Reigeluth that schools should move towards:

- teachers who operate as guides and facilitators of learning rather than sources of learning; under such an organisation, learning would become resource based, project based, and student or group based, rather than teacher and class based
- personal learning plans and contracts for each student, negotiated by the student, the teacher and parents
- multi-age grouping based on developmental level rather than chronological age, allowing a student to remain with one guide and community of learners for longer than a single year
- thinking skills, problem-solving skills and creativity being integrated into an interdisciplinary curriculum
- new, more central and comprehensive roles for technology in schools.

In their paper Rudd *et al* (2006) set out a number of challenges to fundamental assumptions that have historically underpinned the organisation of education (see Box 2). They argue that it is necessary to challenge these assumptions if we are to achieve a fully personalised education system designed around the needs, interests and aspirations of each learner. They suggest that it is only possible to personalise education if we move to 'a system organised through more porous and flexible learning networks that link homes, communities and multiple sites of learning.'

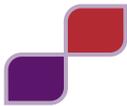
Box 2: Challenges to the education system (Rudd *et al*, 2006)

First, we need to challenge the assumption that expertise and knowledge reside only within the walls of the educational institution, and to ask instead, what might be gained from tapping into the resources that exist in the wider community and within the networks that people are already connected to?

Second, we need to challenge the assumption that 'learning' and 'schooling' are different words for the same thing, and to ask instead what different approaches to and models of learning are also in evidence today in people's work and leisure lives?

Third, we need to challenge the assumption that the most 'equitable' education systems are those which offer a one-size-fits-all approach, and instead examine how the recognition of learners' diverse voices and experiences can enhance inclusion, aspiration and achievement through the creation of personalised educational trajectories.

Finally, as digital resources increasingly offer opportunities for networked, collaborative and distributed learning and interaction, we need to challenge the assumption that the easiest and most cost-effective approach to organising learning is within the walls of the school.



Cyber schools blur established boundaries between public schools and home schools.

Rudd *et al* cite earlier work by Moll in which he advocates 'exploring and leveraging the skills, expertise and informal learning that occurs in learners' homes and cultural backgrounds' and that we need to recognise this in the formal learning context, to value and incorporate it as the basis for more formal learning practices. He contends that in doing this, educators increase the mechanisms for participation, account for diversity and are more likely to produce relevant and engaging learning experiences and challenges. He continues: 'Once these local networks have been established and better utilised then there is a greater likelihood that learners can tap into other distributed social networks with which they can be connected as a result of developing assets and social capital.'

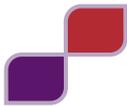
This reflects the thinking of both Brabant (2007) and Epstein (2005) discussed earlier, and also the rationale that underpins some virtual or cyber schools:

'Cyber schools blur established boundaries between public schools and home schools. The popularity of cyber school learning will continue to impact home schooling, particularly if home-school students exercise the opportunity to move back and forth between publicly funded cyber schools and minimally regulated home schools.'

(Ellis, 2008)

In America there is considerable debate regarding Cyber Charter Schools and their ability to offer a more flexible and personalised approach to education as well as their potential to offer a hybrid form of education where part of a young person's schooling is delivered in a 'traditional' environment, for example project-based work, but with elements of the standard curriculum accessed online from home. The reasons for choosing a cyber school, and the potential benefits, are similar to those often cited as the reasons why families elect to home-school (Paradise, 2010; Ahn, 2010; Watson *et al*, 2010). According to Ellis (2008) cyber schools typically deliver between 20% and 80% of their academic instruction online, with parents generally being expected, though not necessarily formally 'contracted', to monitor the learner's work, and they have periodic student-teacher contact, via phone, email or in person. Watson *et al* (2010) point out that virtual schooling is not home-schooling, as virtual schools must meet national or state standards and importantly, 'even though the student is learning at home, it is still the school's job to accommodate his or her needs. Additional support is needed, both for the student and his or her parents, so the school should have services in place to help.'

Ahn (2010) sees this 'hybrid model' where pupils might access their curriculum at home, but attend school for one-to-one support from their teachers as potentially leading to 'innovative organisational and pedagogical strategies' that offer greater levels of personalisation. In a meta-analysis of web-based distance education programmes that also included some classroom-based teaching, Cavanaugh *et al* (2004) suggest that learners in these types of programme make greater improvement than their conventional school counterparts in critical thinking, researching, using computers, learning independently, problem solving, creative thinking, decision making, and time management. The authors also note, however, that learners 'may feel isolated, parents may have concerns about children's social development, students with language difficulties may experience a disadvantage in a text-heavy online environment, and subjects requiring physical demonstrations of skill such as music, physical education, or foreign languages may not be practical in a technology-mediated setting.' Indeed evidence is presented on learner performance in maths and science that suggests these, and other 'highly technical' subjects, are difficult to teach successfully through distance education. The findings of Cavanaugh's meta-analysis suggest that a hybrid model of school organisation that involves both online learning and regular face-to-face contact, such as that offered through a flexi-school approach could be beneficial to learners.



'I want to prune the curriculum of over-prescriptive notions of how to teach and how to timetable. Instead I want to arrive at a simple core.'

Barson (2004) has examined the ways in which home-schooling families organise their support networks and conceptualised it in terms of Wenger's 'Communities of Practice'. Of special note in terms of the organisation of a flexi-school are the concepts of joint enterprise and mutual engagement. 'Joint enterprise' is defined by the participants and creates ways in which the participants are mutually accountable. This process is continually being renegotiated and rewritten.

'Mutual engagement' refers to membership of the community of practice. People work together within the community of practice creating differences as well as similarities. It is said that each person's involvement in the community of practice further integrates and refines it. Mutual engagement also refers to the relationships created within the community of practice. Membership takes a lot of commitment and work and therefore if a person does not feel able to do this they fall away from membership of the community. In this way membership is self-selecting and the continued life of the community of practice carries on as long as members are interested in maintaining it. Engagement in communities of practice is essentially informal and the 'rules' are rewritten constantly within the community. To learn the 'rules' you must be engaged in the practices of the community.

Barson (2004) also highlights what she describes as a more common arrangement in America, the 'co-op model'. 'The co-op model may vary but it has a common element: meeting regularly with other home-educating families for more formal work that resembles the style of education usually carried out in schools. The co-op parents meet together beforehand to discuss what the children will study and how they will go about it. With regard to a community of practice, the mutual engagement with this educational structure has grown from the needs of those home-educating families that attend and changes over time as these needs change.' This fits well with the concept of flexi-schooling and may offer useful insights into aspects of flexi-schooling such as negotiated or personalised curricula and enable a flexi-school to operate using the knowledge and expertise of the parents. As Barson notes, 'The joint enterprise involves more than educating their children. Parents in this community of practice have the joint enterprise of teaching their children a curriculum designed by the parents together. Mutual engagement is through the organisational meetings, regular weekly meetings of the whole group and the parties that surround the co-op.'

Tom Hodgkinson has suggested in *The Idle Parent* that parents may set up 'some kind of community school' where a group of families come together to hire one or two teachers to teach four hours each morning which would then be followed by afternoons of outdoor activities, groups, clubs or societies. This is not dissimilar to more formal neighbourhood home-schooling networks in the US.

Curriculum design and assessment

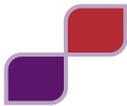
'I want to prune the curriculum of over-prescriptive notions of how to teach and how to timetable. Instead I want to arrive at a simple core.'

Michael Gove³

Whatever the model of school organisation adopted it must meet the needs of young people and a desire to move away from a 'one-size-fits all' curriculum to 'one that meets their own needs and connects with their own lives' (Bayliss *et al*, 2002).

Michael Gove has suggested that there should be greater flexibility in what is taught beyond a core of subject-specific content. The law sets out that for flexi-school pupils, 'On days the pupil is attending school as a registered pupil, he or she must follow the National Curriculum and cannot be

³ Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education's speech to the National College Annual Conference 17 June 2010, accessed 5 October 2010
http://www.michaelgove.com/content/national_college_annual_conference



Hypothetically, students are no longer bound by an 8am–3pm school day or a September–June school year.

disapplied from statutory curriculum or assessment arrangements' (Leicestershire County Council, 2008). However, this does not limit the freedom and flexibility to experiment with the rest of the curriculum, howsoever it is delivered. Indeed the RSA Opening Minds⁴ approach to the secondary curriculum enables schools to design and develop a curriculum based round the development of five key competences: citizenship, learning, managing information, relating to people and managing situations. This competence-based approach enables students not just to acquire subject knowledge but to understand, use and apply it within the context of their wider learning and life.

Ahn (2010) notes that in the US, Cyber Charter Schools 'can dramatically restructure curriculum, time, physical facilities, and social support to guide students through the learning process. For example, students who take online courses can move at their own pace and access the curriculum anytime, anywhere. Hypothetically, students are no longer bound by an 8am–3pm school day or a September–June school year. Learning can happen anytime, all-the-time.' Whilst Hollinsclough's own virtual learning environment is currently in the early stages of development, it does offer the flexi-school an innovative and reliable way of delivering a curriculum at a time and pace that suits the needs of home-schooling families, if they choose to access it.

Whilst aimed at secondary age pupils, Kunskapsskolen in Sweden may be another curriculum model of interest to those considering setting up a flexi-school. The four distinctive components of the approach to teaching and learning at Kunskapsskolen are:

1. Goal-oriented education

Pupils are set long-term learning and attainment goals. Pupils, teachers and parents agree on the goals that each pupil will work to achieve by the end of his or her final year at the school. These long-term goals are broken down into a plan, with goals for each term and each week. These are followed up week by week in individual tutorial discussions. Part of this process is described as pupils 'finding the learning style that best suits their needs'.

2. Personal supervision

Pupils are assigned a teacher as a personal tutor, who follows them through their school years. The role of the personal tutor is to help and train pupils in 'planning and developing their learning strategies', following up school work and being available for 'support and control'. Pupils are 'allowed' to take increasing responsibility for their own studies. This method of working is intended to teach pupils, step by step, to take personal responsibility and to become independent. Personal supervision is described as the most important factor in ensuring that personalised education is functioning properly.

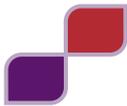
3. Opportunities for parents to follow school work

Parents have the opportunity to follow their children's studies in logbooks and via the Kunskapporten (The Knowledge Portal), where the planning and course materials are available online. Teachers enter all results, remaining tasks, comments etc in the school's Pupil Documentation System, which is accessible via the internet. The portal gives access to all educational aids and resources.

4. Steps and courses

Pupils study the various subjects either in 'steps' or 'courses'. Pupils study English, mathematics and modern languages in 35 steps. Which step they start on depends on how much they have already learnt in the subject. There are goals for each step and a description of what is required to reach different grades. The steps arrangement means that it is possible for pupils to vary the pace at which they learn, regardless of their school year. Pupils study the

⁴ see <http://www.rsaopeningminds.org.uk/>



Home-schooling parents are often accused of preventing their children from accessing suitable social development opportunities...

other subjects in the form of courses, where several subjects are connected by a common theme. Each course has subject goals and grade requirements. Pupils study one course at a time, choosing to work at one of three levels of achievement, which lead to Pass (Godkänt), Credit (Väl godkänt) and Distinction (Mycket väl godkänt), respectively. The steps and courses are taught in a variety of lesson formats, including lectures, workshops, seminars and laboratory experiments which pupils and tutors can combine in a weekly schedule. Pupils can vary the time they devote to lessons and independent studies in each subject.

All of these components could, with some adaptation, suit a 'flexi-school' approach to education and are similar to Hollinsclough's ethos, Individual Learning Plan, proposed Virtual Learning Environment and Stage not Age approach.

Taylor-Hough (2010) refers to the ideas of John Taylor Gatto on curriculum, where the essential components of the curriculum can be summarised as 'teach serious material', 'encourage maturity' and 'train to be leaders and adventurers'. Box 3 shows more detail of what these three areas might cover. It can be seen that it may fit well with a flexi-school approach as it covers many areas of the National Curriculum whilst also allowing flexibility in terms of personal, emotional and social development and also delivery methods.

Box 3: John Taylor Gatto's curriculum

Teach serious material

- History
- Literature (real books)
- Philosophy
- Music
- Art
- Economics
- Theology
- Being flexible about time, textbooks, materials, and tests

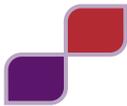
Encourage maturity

- Thinking critically and independently
- Self-control
- Financial responsibility
- Self-entertainment
- Capacity for insight
- Examining political and commercial statements
- Developing deep friendships/relationships

Train to be leaders and adventurers

- Encouraging curiosity and questions
- Giving autonomy to take risks now and then
- Adventure
- Resilience
- Introducing kids to competent adults

What is evident in the curriculum designs referred to in this paper is the need to ensure both academic and social development. Home-schooling parents are often accused of preventing their children from accessing suitable social development opportunities; however these models indicate that non-traditional forms of school organisation can accommodate social skill development and,



Assessing and recording what is learnt is perhaps more problematic than developing an appropriate curriculum, although both must take into account the way children learn when not in school.

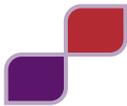
as Watson *et al* (2010) note, there is preliminary evidence that pupils enrolled in non-traditional models of schooling such as virtual education 'might have an advantage in their social skills development if they are highly engaged in activities outside the school day – including both activities involving peer interaction and activities not involving peer interaction.'

Assessing and recording what is learnt is perhaps more problematic than developing an appropriate curriculum, although both must take into account the way children learn when not in school. Shepherd (2008) refers to research by Thomas and Pattison who interviewed and observed 26 families who home-educated, between them, more than 70 children. The authors discovered that these children absorbed information mainly by 'doing nothing, observing, having conversations, exploring, and through self-directed learning'. They liken the 'chaotic nature' of informal learning to the process that leads to scientific breakthroughs, the early stages of crafting a novel, coming up with a solution to a technical problem, or the act of composing music where 'its products are often intangible, its processes obscure, its progress piecemeal'. The learning process is not linear: 'there are false starts, unrelated bits and pieces picked up, interests followed and discarded, sometimes to be taken up again, sometimes not... Yet the chaotic nature of the informal curriculum does not appear to be a barrier to children organising it into a coherent body of knowledge.' What is problematic for the flexi-school is how these learning processes can be accurately recorded, shared between home and school and assessed. It could be suggested that these issues are similar to those that have been faced by Alternative Education Provision (AEP) in the UK. The failings of AEP are often considered to be its inability to record learning and assess or monitor learner progress effectively (Ofsted, 2004).

Rothermel (2002) comments on how forms of assessment common in schools may not be appropriate for home-schooling contexts: 'Observations made during the testing programme showed just how inappropriate it was to use school-style measures on home-educated children... The tests gave no insight into the extent of these children's learning. The research found that the children's learning was best described as a multidirectional and multilayered model, and that such a model was not provided for by standard tests.' In a flexi-schooling context the approach to assessment needs to be consistent across school and non-school learning environments and thus will not be appropriate for a flexi-school either.

Rothermel (2002) also notes that many standard instruments are 'norm' based and that if assessment instruments 'adopt norms by which to judge such children, they will almost invariably find these children to be outside the "norm". What is desirable behaviour from a schoolchild is very different from what is deemed desirable behaviour from a home-educated child.'

Rudd *et al* (2006) highlight a number of scenarios for changing the education system. They clearly have implications for assessment and curriculum design but how do they fit with home-educators' needs and desires? They suggest that the system may 'try to change the learning practices that take place outside schools, and to make them more like those which occur in school.' In other words, educators may attempt to identify and potentially ally with other sites of learning (homes, community youth groups) in order to promote formal learning approaches and to transmit the ethos and values of the school. It is possible that this may have positive effects, particularly in relation to standards and attendance, as parents learn more about what their children are doing in school and how best to support their formal education, and also because learners have more opportunities to practise and understand the subjects, skills and processes of formal learning outside of the school setting. However, this 'curricularisation' of the home or non-formal setting does not necessarily build on and harness wider skills. The emphasis here is still firmly on valuing



Expert days provided researchers with an opportunity to meet each other and some of the experts, mentors and technicians.

formal learning above other forms, and may not sit well with home-schooling families. Alternatively, Rudd suggests, the system could make greater attempts to recognise and connect with non-formal learning and harness it; this would see all stakeholders working together to develop more tailored learning pathways and engaging with the resources of the wider community to achieve collaboratively determined goals.

In the flexi-school model children and their families will come into school once or twice a week. One question is: How do you make best use of this time in school? It may be that aspects of the formal curriculum are taught or it may be that some of these days are 'expert days' that potentially make use of the skills and knowledge of families or the wider community.

'Expert days provided researchers with an opportunity to meet each other and some of the experts, mentors and technicians. They provided the opportunity for researchers to extend their expertise in highly specialised areas such as music or dance and to gain accreditation where possible. They also proved useful in re-engaging, supporting or training researchers – if the need arose – and in some cases the researchers were able to train the mentors. These days were always specialised in focus, and never designed to 'teach the basics.'

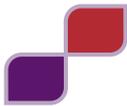
(Notschool, 2002)

Establishing user demand and need

Brabant (2007) notes the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century stressed that improvement in the administration of education worked best when grounded in the participation of local communities. It recommended a decentralisation of school systems in order to bring schools and education closer to communities and families. From the outset we felt it important to ensure that the flexi-school model was designed collaboratively with full involvement of all stakeholders including parents/carers, professionals with statutory responsibilities, teachers and young people. For example, our approach gave all stakeholders a place on the Expert Reference Group.

Flexi-schooling, as a model, must be able to accommodate a wealth of motivations for home-schooling or non-traditional schooling and approaches to, or philosophies of, 'education'. It is essential for anyone considering establishing a flexi-school option to determine that not only is there a desire and demand for this form of schooling but to also recognise that there is a need to work with parents to map their desired outcomes against those of the school to determine what can and should be delivered, what can be measured, and how. Related to this is the recommendation from Leicestershire County Council (2008) that the school has a written agreement with the parents about a flexi-schooling arrangement so that expectations and understandings are clear for both parties. The possible content of such an agreement can be seen in Box 4 on page 22.

Atkinson *et al* (2006) noted in their study that many home-educators were calling for 'greater access to learning opportunities for their children'. In terms of determining user needs they also raise a number of issues that flexi-schooling must address. They highlight that for some home-schooling families access to specialist support for families with children with SEN can be difficult. This is backed up by a more recent Ofsted investigation which notes: 'Almost all the parents surveyed whose children had special educational needs and/or disabilities had removed them from school because they believed their child's needs were not being met. However, once they were educating their children at home they experienced a lack of specialist support' (Ofsted, 2010). Similar issues have been noted in Australia by Reilly *et al* (2002): 'Families undergo the home



The in-school part of a flexi-school arrangement could be seen as a means to ease the coordination of access to specialist support and ensure that children's needs are met.

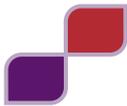
Box 4: A parent-school agreement might cover the following:

- What days/sessions the child will or will not normally attend school, and if appropriate, over what period of time
- What flexibility there will be regarding special events which fall outside the normal arrangement, e.g. assemblies, trips, productions or performances, sports events, visitors to the school, etc
- How the register will be marked
- That the parents must contact the school if the pupil is absent from a session that they would normally be present at school or at approved educational activity
- That the school will follow up any unexpected or unexplained absence in the same way as it does for other pupils
- What the arrangement will be at times of pupils' assessment
- If parents choose 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
- Any perceived special educational needs and associated provision
- Recommended regular planning meetings between parent and school to ensure the child achieves his/her potential and to promote good home-school relationships (to be agreed, e.g. termly)
- That the school will notify the local authority of the flexi-school arrangement and if it appears that the home-educated part of a flexi-school arrangement is not suitable, then the school and local authority will work in partnership to engage with the parents and resolve the concerns about the child's education
- That the school will inform the local authority if it appears the child is not receiving suitable full-time education
- Under what circumstances and with what notice either party can withdraw from the arrangement, including an exit strategy if appropriate
- How any disputes will be resolved (i.e. normal processes are for disputes to be resolved at the most informal level possible, but ultimately any complaints have to be considered by the headteacher first and then the governing body under the school's complaints procedures).

schooling process with limited funding, which restricts the teaching materials utilised. Therefore more accessible arrangements with schools are required, particularly in non-academic areas, so that children educated at home are not disadvantaged in terms of resources and specialised equipment.' The in-school part of a flexi-school arrangement could be seen as a means to ease the coordination of access to specialist support and ensure that children's needs are met.

Atkinson *et al* (2006) also note a difference between parents who decide to home-educate their children before they start school and parents who withdraw their children as a result of negative school experiences. The latter group of parents often have little or no time to plan in advance for home education, suggesting that they might require greater levels of support. Again this support, in the form of learning resources or time, could be part of the flexi-school offer.

The importance of understanding the needs of potential users can be demonstrated by findings in the final report of the research phase of 'notschool'. 'Notschool' deliberately avoids using terminology such as 'teachers' and 'pupils' – instead referring to teaching staff as 'mentors' and 'buddies' and pupils as 'researchers'. The evaluators claim that this is more than semantics, it is an accurate reflection of the actual relationships and also contributes to removing the 'school' barrier for those for whom it is an issue. Whilst this is a seemingly small detail, it is such attention to detail that could make some potential users of a flexi-school feel more included.



*...a good
classroom teacher
is not necessarily
a good online
teacher...*

Professional development

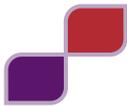
A core component of the flexi-school model at Hollinsclough is the involvement of parents and the wider community in the delivery of teaching – Brabant's (2007) notion of the 'educational village' mentioned earlier. Epstein (2005) supports this view and notes 'theory posits that children have higher achievement and greater school success if their homes, schools, and communities share responsibilities for guiding and supporting student learning'. She continues that if this is the case then school leaders, teaching staff and administrative staff need professional development opportunities that reflect this more collaborative understanding of how to educate children. Not only do they need to 'learn to work together and to customise school, family, and community partnerships' but they also need support to recognise that teachers who believe that they share responsibilities with parents and others for student success will most likely teach differently to those who believe that they, alone, are responsible for student learning, and school leaders need help to understand that managing a 'learning community' is different from managing a school.

Indeed, Davis and Roblyer (2005) point out that 'a good classroom teacher is not necessarily a good online teacher' and it is almost certainly the case that a good classroom teacher is not necessarily a good teacher of flexi-schooled pupils, as there will be different demands and skills. Identifying what these skills are is important and must form part of the evaluation of any alternative models of delivery; for example: How does course planning differ? Are there additional communication skills? Is there good coordination of diverse learner activities? Is the role as much about advice and support for learner and families (facilitation) – as direct instruction?

Legal issues

Guidance issued by Leicestershire County Council in 2008 covers many of the major legal issues regarding flexi-schooling. For example, as of 2008:

- The overall responsibility for a child's education lies with the parent, and section 9 of the Education Act 1996 contains the principle that children should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.
- Children who attend part time under a flexi-schooling arrangement count for the purposes of the infant class size regulations, that is the limit of 30 children per teacher. They are not allowable exceptions to the infant class size limit (although they may be allowable exceptions for different reasons).
- If it appears that the home-educated part of a flexi-school arrangement is not suitable, it is the responsibility of the local authority, not the school, to intervene. The parent will first be issued with a notice to satisfy the local authority that the child is receiving suitable education. If the parent's reply does not show the local authority that the child is receiving suitable education then issuing a school attendance order is not possible as the child is already on a school roll. In these circumstances the local authority would advise the school to mark the child as 'unauthorised absent' when not in school, and follow normal non-attendance processes. These actions should rarely be necessary. One possible way of resolving this could be for the local authority, by agreement with the headteacher, to ask the parent for the child to attend school full-time.
- For the child attending part time under current arrangements, the school receives full funding. Flexi-schooled children are included in count returns as for other children.



A flexi-school or 'learning hub' approach could go a long way to ensuring local authorities can fulfil their statutory duties and provide support and resources to both parents and children.

- Children who attend part time under a flexi-schooling arrangement are subject to the same school admission processes as other children. They count towards numbers for admissions purposes and they must be entered on the admissions register.

Departmental and local authority advice to this project states that if schools agree to a flexi-schooling arrangement, registers should be marked as 'authorised absences' under Code 'C' once leave of absence has been granted to be educated at home.

Ofsted (2010) points out that current legislation around home education 'severely hampers local authorities in fulfilling their statutory duties to safeguard children who are educated at home and ensure the suitability of their education, as well as to provide support and resources to home-educating parents and their children.' A flexi-school or 'learning hub' approach could go a long way to ensuring local authorities can fulfil their statutory duties and provide support and resources to both parents and children.

Rothermel (2002) states that the right of children to learn autonomously (self-directed learning) was established through the case of *Harrison & Harrison v Stevenson*, heard at Worcester Crown Court (1981). The judge held that the Harrisons' unstructured form of education was satisfactory, holding that a 'suitable education' was one which 'prepares children for life in a modern, civilised society' and an 'efficient education' was one which 'achieves what it set out to achieve'.

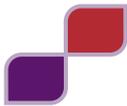
Funding

As noted above under current arrangements, a UK school receives full funding for flexi-schooled children; however, this raises a number of issues regarding funding, especially where flexi-schooled pupils may previously have been home-schooled. Rapp *et al* (2006) note cyber charter schools 'offer home-schooling families the option of public financing for a programme that relieves parents of much of the instructional burden but with little loss of autonomy.' In America there is concern about the costs of alternative delivery models for schooling, who will meet them and the impact on the public purse, especially as many of those taking up alternative delivery models such as cyber schooling are previously home-schooled (Rapp *et al* 2006, Ellis 2008) and therefore did not attract state funding, thus shifting the funding burden 'from the family to the taxpayers' (Ellis, 2008).

Though their study is based on US data and policy context, Rapp *et al* (2006) raise a number of pertinent issues with regard to funding that translate into notions of 'out-of-county' placements (cross-district in the US context), and local authority responsibilities (state or district in the US context). They note:

- some states can claim 75% or more of a state's per-pupil allocation for each student who enrolls in the school
- some states, for example Colorado, specifically ban online schools from enrolling previously home-schooled students
- some states, for example Indiana, have legislated against cyber charter schools providing 'solely home-based instruction'.

In the last bullet, the use of the word 'solely' in the statute allows room for interpretation whereby home schools could become charter schools by providing primarily cyber instruction but use a 'bricks-and-mortar' school for testing or other purposes that require minimal time outside of the home.



Will flexi-schooled pupils continue to attract full funding in the UK in the current economic climate?

Whilst it may be possible to receive full or part funding from the local authority it may be necessary to part-fund flexi-school arrangements on a fee-paying basis. In America, Bauman (2005) refers to research that suggests home-schooling families typically spend around \$300 to \$500 on curricular materials each year. If these materials are supplied through the flexi-school it would be possible for each family to have access to a wider range of materials whilst paying a similar or lesser amount of money to the school.

As with the Hollinsclough advisory group, some American authors (Rapp *et al*, 2006) have highlighted questions about funding as 'the most important to address' in discussions of issues surrounding non-traditional forms of school organisation. Indeed great concerns have been expressed, especially if large numbers of currently home-schooled pupils choose to enrol in cyber charter schools in America, as there will be a considerable additional strain on public funds. Thus they warn it is essential to address complex questions about funding, such as 'should a virtual school receive full per pupil funding?' sooner rather than later. Will flexi-schooled pupils continue to attract full funding in the UK in the current economic climate? If not, what percentage of funding will they attract or will this be left to individual local authorities to decide?

Wider impact on the school

What might the impact of flexi-schooling be on the school as a whole? The model of flexi-schooling proposed by Hollinsclough incorporates high levels of family and community involvement. According to Ofsted (2007) this could have a beneficial effect on the wider school. If the school effectively identifies the particular knowledge or expertise which parents and carers can share with children, the impact of parental contributions to learning can be 'significant'. There is no reason why parents of full-time pupils should not contribute in this way or that the full-time pupils should not benefit from the input and expertise of flexi-schooling families. The same report also provides an example of one school where the school website was used to give guidance to parents and carers about helping their children with homework. The school allocated a specific area for parents and carers on its website to help them to support their children. The pupils produced their own material to explain current methods in mathematics and aspects of literacy to enable parents and carers to help with homework more effectively. 'Parents, carers and children in the school reported that this information significantly helped the parents to support their children with homework' (Ofsted 2007). Thus it could be argued that any resources designed to support flexi-schooling families can also be beneficial to all families attending the school.

Whilst not a key driver for establishing a flexi-school there is potential to generate income from supporting home-schooling families and thus increase the sustainability of small rural schools. Bauman (2005) notes that: 'A second reason for the importance of homeschooling on the policy front is the potential growth of schools and institutions that serve homeschoolers. Some of these may be created by homeschoolers themselves. However, most are businesses and organisations lured by the expanding home-school market.' (Hill, 2000).

Conclusion

Bauman (2005) suggests that whilst there are no definitive answers to the motivations underlying why families opt out of the state education system, the rise of home-schooling shows 'a true, grass-roots desire for change in our educational system'. The evidence shows that there is a place for flexi-schooling within the existing state education system in the UK and that the issues we originally identified as potential barriers are surmountable – they simply have to be recognised and



And so every school, regardless of its status, works for itself and for the whole system.

faced head on – and that there is evidence, primarily from America, of how this might be achieved. Flexi-schooling is a perfect example of Michael Gove's call for schools to be 'crucibles of innovation':

*'If we can develop schools to become crucibles of innovation on behalf of the whole system, working for the sake of all children as well as meeting the needs of parents who are seeking different provision, then the sum continues to be greater than the parts. And so every school, regardless of its status, works for itself and for the whole system.'*⁵

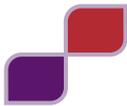
It may be more appropriate to call the Hollinsclough School model a 'learning network', or 'learning hub', rather than a 'flexi-school' as this reflects the collaborative nature of families and the wider community working with the school to deliver personalised educational opportunities. As Rudd *et al* (2006) note, there is a need for the education system to 'harness the diverse and multiple sites of expertise and learning that exist outside the school walls. Full personalisation will require the creation of powerful learning networks.'

It is hoped the Hollinsclough model will provide one way of doing this. The model, whilst in its initial stages of implementation, enables parents to select a 'mode' of schooling that best suits their needs:

- **Option 1** – full-time education within statutory guidelines
- **Option 2** – part-time education, where the child comes on agreed days, wears school uniform, and joins in with timetabled opportunities for that day
- **Option 3** – children and parents/carers come to a 'Learning Hub' at least once every two weeks, for an education surgery, show and tell opportunities, or an activity day.

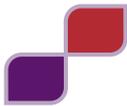
Based on the findings of this RER and our experiences so far, we strongly believe that the potential benefits of flexi-schooling far outweigh the potential disadvantages.

⁵ Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education's speech to the National College Annual Conference 17 June 2010, accessed 05/10/2010
http://www.michaelgove.com/content/national_college_annual_conference

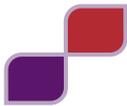


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Appendix A: Summary of potential benefits and disadvantages of flexi-schooling

Table 1: Potential benefits and disadvantages of flexi-schooling	
Benefits	Disadvantages
Flexibility helps retain children within the system	Impact on teaching staff – time and professional development
Offers a phased approach to reintegration	Children may feel isolated and parents may have concerns about children's social development
Offers support and encouragement to home-schooling families	Ensuring accurate and appropriate assessment of learning
Enables greater levels of personalisation whilst delivering the national curriculum	Funding
Enables education to be an 'anytime-anywhere' experience	
Enables the creation of purposeful links between homes, communities and multiple sites of learning	
May lead to higher development of competences such as critical thinking, researching, using computers, learning independently, problem-solving, creative thinking, decision-making, and time management	
Enables access to specialist support	
Any resources designed to support flexi-schooling families can also be beneficial to all families attending the school	



Appendix B: Research design

The approach taken contained three elements:

1. A Rapid Evidence Review
2. An Expert Reference Group
3. A reflexive Design and Research Project

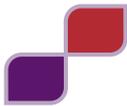
The table below shows the research questions set out in the research specification document and the relationship with each of the project elements. Note that the distinction between the Design and Research project and the other two elements is a false one in that the Rapid Evidence Review and the Expert Reference Group are integral elements of the Design and Research project and contribute significantly to the ‘suggestion’ and ‘development’ phases. Here it is intended to signify the development, evaluation and conclusion phases of a Design and Research process.

Table 2: Research questions set out in the research specification document and the relationship with each of the project elements			
Research questions	Research elements		
	Rapid Evidence Review	Expert Reference Group	Design and Research project
RQ1 What is known regarding flexi-schooling internationally?	✓		
RQ2 What are the challenges to flexi-schooling and how might they be overcome?	✓	✓	✓
RQ3 How can the Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling be replicated?		✓	✓

Rapid Evidence Review

A Rapid Evidence Review was conducted covering UK and international examples of policy development, research into and guidance for developing and supporting flexi-schools, elective home education, non-formal education (e.g. Forest Schools) and virtual schooling. Its focus was on the systems, processes and structures required to establish a workable model of flexi-schooling that meets both statutory requirements and the needs of parents and the young people themselves.

The Rapid Evidence Review did not include research or evaluation reports that are focused on the relative merits and disadvantages of home-schooling, the effectiveness of home-schooling, or the reasons underlying the decision to home-school.



Expert Reference Group

The group met twice during the project but was also expected to contribute to responding to issues raised during the face-to-face meetings. The Expert Reference Group was facilitated and supported by Janette Mountford-Lees and Paul Gutherson.

Meeting 1

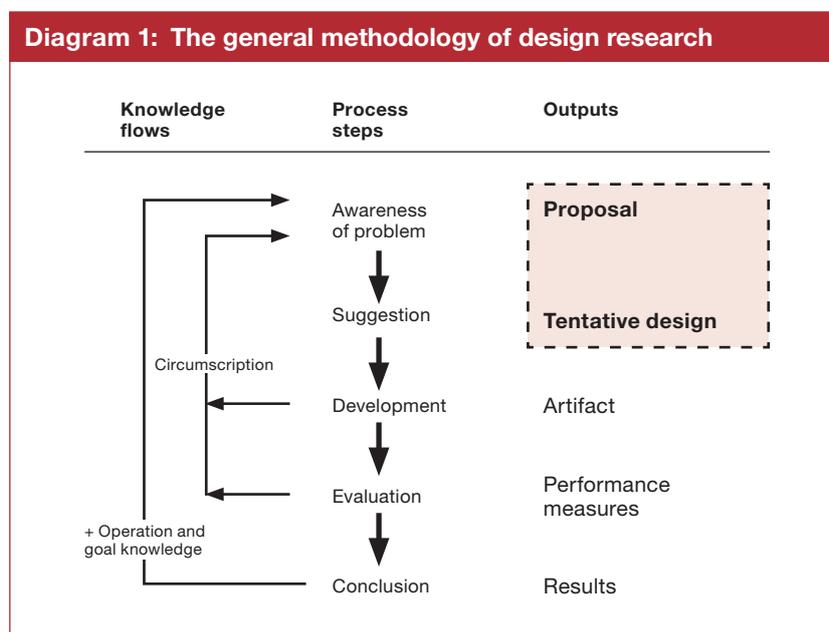
The initial Expert Reference Group meeting was used to determine areas of focus for the Design and Research Project. In particular it aimed to enable each stakeholder group to raise the issues that were most important for them in designing a model of flexi-schooling.

Meeting 2

The second Expert Reference Group meeting reviewed the findings of the Design and Research Project and considered in detail the implications of the Hollinsclough model of flexi-schooling.

Design and Research Project

The aim of the Design and Research Project was to formalise the collective available knowledge surrounding flexi-schooling into a model of operational principles that would meet the statutory and educational needs of all stakeholders. The Design and Research process is represented diagrammatically below.

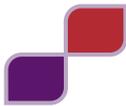


Step 1 (Awareness of problem) of this process has been completed, in that Hollinsclough School has identified the problems surrounding flexi-schooling and the CfBT research specification, and in this response, has articulated the problem further and set out a proposal for a research effort.

The initial meeting of the Expert Reference Group and the Rapid Evidence Review made significant contributions to the ‘suggestion’ phase and resulted in the design of a tentative model for flexi-schooling.



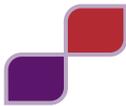
The development and evaluation phases involved the headteacher, Janette Mountford-Lees, refining, applying and testing the model by applying it in the Hollinsclough School context and also through further interviews with key stakeholders and through the second Expert Reference Group meeting. This phase was about ensuring fitness for purpose of the ‘tentative’ model, through real-life application of the model, and adapting it where necessary. This was followed by a conclusion phase where the finalised model was written up and shared more widely so that others might learn from the model.



Appendix C

Examples of flexi-schooling documentation used at Hollinsclough School

		Hollinsclough C of E (VA) Primary School Home Educator Support Contract: 2010 Mission Statement				
		<i>"To encourage the enthusiasm and joy of learning through a creative curriculum and a holistic approach to education that reflects Christian values and supports our community. We guarantee accessibility and availability to all."</i>				
Developing potential						
Child's name						
Name of parent(s), carer(s)						
Reason for Flexi-School Education (optional)		<i>(For example: Lifestyle, Philosophical, Bullying, Cultural, Religious Belief, Additional Needs)</i>				
Parents/Carers expectations of school (desirable)		<i>(continue overleaf if necessary)</i>				
Type of work to be continued at home		<i>(continue overleaf if necessary)</i>				
Child's achievements, skills, hobbies, interests, activities		<i>(continue overleaf if necessary)</i>				
Current levels of attainment achieved (if applicable)						
Additional Educational/Personal Need(s) (if applicable and may require further discussion)					Yes/No	
Educational Assessment/Review Acceptable					Yes/No	
Form in which work from home shared with school (if desired – please circle)			Written	Verbal	Graphic	Electronic
Standard admissions information provided to administration staff					Yes/No	
Other Information Parents/Carers may wish to share: <i>(continue overleaf if necessary)</i>						
I/We agree to ensure that the child has adequate opportunity for Health Care			Signed (parent/carer):			
			Date:			
I/We agree to be fully responsible for child's safety when not on school premises and under parental care			Signed (parent/carer):			
			Date:			
I/We agree to bring the child to school at least once every two weeks			Signed (parent/carer):			
			Date:			
Signed (School contact):					Date:	
Position:						
Hollinsclough Flexi-school documents 2010						



Developing potential

Hollinsclough C of E (VA) Primary School

Carr Lane, Hollinsclough, Nr. Buxton, Staffordshire, SK17 0RH
01298 83303
E.mail – headteacher@hollinsclough.staffs.sch.uk

Headteacher: Mrs Janette Mountford-Lees MA B Ed. NPQH



Tuesday, 23 November 2010

Dear **Parent/Carer**,

Flexi-School arrangements

We welcome children who are home tutored to our school, and firmly believe that it can be an arrangement which would be beneficial to us all.

We allow access to all areas of the curriculum, including French, PE and swimming. We are also able to assess the needs of all children and advise on next steps. We can provide exercise books and writing materials for use at home, and can arrange for other resources to be borrowed.

We expect all of our children, when in school, to follow our 'Golden Rules' which the children and adults have developed together.

These are:

- We are gentle
- We are kind and helpful
- We listen
- We are honest
- We work hard
- We look after property

We also encourage all children to wear school colours to promote cohesion, but this is purely voluntary.

School colours are:

- Grey skirt or trousers
- White shirt, polo shirt or tee shirt
- Navy blue jumper, sweat shirt or cardigan

(School wear with the school emblem can be ordered from the office.)

We need to know how much of the curriculum parents wish the school to be responsible for, and how much would be taught at home. If no English or mathematics is completed during school time, then we would appreciate examples of this work each term, so that we can see how well the children are doing. All children keep a **Record of Achievement** which includes certificates, examples of learning, creative outcomes, group work, visits and/or whatever the child feels to be valuable and feels proud of.

If you need to discuss any of the above, please feel free to come in and discuss arrangements. We look forward to seeing you.

Regards

Mrs. Janette Mountford-Lees MA B Ed. NPQH

Headteacher
Hollinsclough C of E (VA) Primary School
01298 83303

www.hollinsclough.staffs.sch.uk
headteacher@hollinsclough.staffs.sch.uk

Hollinsclough Flexi-school documents 2010

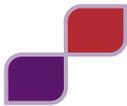


Table 3: Hollinsclough C of E (VA) Primary School

Whole School Timetable 2010 – Autumn Term												
Monday	JML – ERIC time CM – B. Reading 8.40–9.00	LC – B. Reading 9.00–9.30	Class 2 – Topic Class 1 – Focused Activities JML KS2/CM&LC Class 1 9.15–10.15		LC	Class 2 – Numeracy Class 1 – Focused Activities JML KS2/CM&LC Class 1 10.30–12.00		Dinner 12.00–12.30 SM – Dinnertime play 12.30–1.00	Guided Reading JML/CM/LC 1.00–2.00	JML	Class 2 – Tables Class 1 – Story JML – Assembly	
Tuesday	Assembly CM 8.40–9.00	Creative Writing CM/LC 9.00–9.45		ICT LC/CM 9.45–10.15	CM	All-Investigative Science LC/CM 10.30–12.00			CI 2 – French CW CI 1 – Spelling CM/LC	CI 2 – Spelling CM/LC CI 1 – French CW	LC	Music 2.15–3.00 CW
Wednesday	Assembly Priest/JML 8.40–9.00	JML – PSHE CM/LC BR 9.00–9.30	RE JML Readers CM/LC 9.30–10.30 – Late play		JML	Class 2 – Numeracy Class 1 – Focused Activities JML KS2/CM&LC Class 1 10.45–12.00			PE 1.00–2.30	Handwriting 2.30–3.00		
Thursday	Assembly JML 8.40–9.00	LC – B. Reading 9.00–9.30	Class 2 – Literacy Skills CM Class 1 – Phonics JML/LC 9.30–10.15		LC	Class 2 – Literacy Skills CM Class 1 – Space, shape and measure JML/LC 10.30–12.00			Class 2 – Focused Activities JML Class 1 – Focused Activities CM/LC 1.00–2.00	CI 2 – Focused Activities JML CI 1 – Focused Activities CM/LC 2.15–3.00		
Friday	Learning Platforms (CM – B. Reading 8.40–9.00)		Swimming LC/CM 9.30–10.30			Nurture LC/CM	Library Time		Golden Time & Playtime SM	Late Dinner	Art and Craft/D&T LC/CM 1.30–2.30	

Register 8.30 am

B. Reading = focused reading support for 2 pupils each term

ELS/ALS/FLS = Literacy support groups (Early, Additional and Further Literacy Support)

Red – whole class Purple – Class 2 (mostly KS2) Blue – Class 1 (mostly KS1 and Reception children – depending on ability)

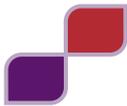


Table 4: Hollinsclough C of E (VA) Primary School								
Whole School Timetable 2011 – Spring Term								
Monday	Assembly	Literacy Skills Guided Reading KS1 Focused Activity	Playtime	F&S	Numeracy Skills KS1 Focused Activity	Dinner 12.00–12.30 Playtime 12.30–1.00	My World Afternoon Self-managed learning	
Tuesday	Assembly SEAL	KS2 French and music KS1 Focused Activity	Playtime	F&S	KS2 Numeracy Skills KS1 French and music			Art and Craft/D&T Workshop
Wednesday	Assembly Priest	KS2 Literacy Skills KS1 RE/Free Choice Activities	Playtime	F&S	KS2 RE KS1 Focused Activity			PE Activities
Thursday	Assembly	KS2 Literacy Skills KS1 Focused Activity	Playtime	F&S	Numeracy Skills KS1 Focused Activity			Topic
Friday	Assembly	Swimming Nurture (tea and toast)			Science Activities	Practical Numeracy Activities	PSHE (KS2)	

Register 8.30 am
 B. Reading = focused reading support for 2 pupils each term
 ELS/ALS/FLS = Literacy support groups (Early, Additional and Further Literacy Support)
 Red – whole class Purple – Class 2 (mostly KS2) Blue – Class 1 (mostly KS1 and Reception children – depending on ability)



*New models for organising education:
‘Flexi-schooling’ – how one school does it well*





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