

The Can-Ask / Cannot-Ask Quick Reference Card

What a Local Authority can reasonably ask home educators for, and what it cannot demand. Keep this somewhere handy for the next time a letter arrives.

First, check which one you have received

Informal enquiry: a routine check-in, typically annual, with no legal compulsion. A short written response is usually sufficient.

Formal Section 437(1) notice: served only where there is a genuine concern about suitable education. Legally binding, with at least 15 days to respond.

A Local Authority CAN reasonably ask for

- ✓ **A written description of your approach**
A brief, honest account of how your child is learning, covering literacy, numeracy and the general shape of their education.
- ✓ **Confirmation of parental responsibility**
Who has parental responsibility, and that home education is genuinely taking place.
- ✓ **Real examples of learning**
What your child has actually been learning. A description of activities and progress is generally enough, original work is not required.
- ✓ **How the education suits your child**
Including any additional needs, aptitudes or circumstances relevant to what "suitable" means for them.
- ✓ **Roughly annual contact**
About once a year is the frequency generally considered reasonable for an informal enquiry.

A Local Authority CANNOT demand

- ✗ **Entry to your home**
There is no automatic right of entry. You can offer evidence in writing or at a neutral location instead.
- ✗ **To see or speak with your child alone**
There is no general power to insist on interviewing your child without a parent present.
- ✗ **A specific curriculum or timetable**
You do not have to follow the National Curriculum, any scheme of work, or a school-style day.
- ✗ **Copies of original work**
There is no general statutory requirement to hand over work samples, though you may choose to.
- ✗ **Medical records**
Or sensitive diagnostic detail beyond what is relevant to your child's educational needs.
- ✗ **Names of other home educating families**
You never have to share who you know or are connected with.
- ✗ **Photos, video or lesson plans as routine**
These are not legal requirements for demonstrating suitable education.
- ✗ **Long forms unrelated to education**
Paperwork that strays beyond whether your child's education is suitable is not required.

This reference card reflects general legal principles under the Education Act 1996 and is not a substitute for independent legal advice in relation to your specific circumstances.