

Choosing a School

All parents find searching for the best school for their child difficult. However, as a parent with a child that has SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) this can be especially challenging.

The transition between primary and secondary school can be stressful for pupils with SEND, but being informed and prepared for the transition process can help to make it less stressful.

This leaflet will hopefully assist you as we answer some of the most asked questions and guide you on the transition to secondary school, helping you navigate your way through one of the most crucial times in your child's life.

Planning Ahead

The first step for a successful transition to secondary school is planning ahead. The choice of schools available are wide and varied so planning ahead will give you enough time to review each individual school and assess whether it's right for your child. You should start thinking about where to send your child when they are in year 5 or even prior to this.

Think about the support your child receives at their primary school and how this helps them. You can enquire to secondary schools as to how they would be able to deliver the same help that your child received in primary school.

However, it is important for you to remember that provision is often delivered differently in secondary school than in primary. An example would be that it would be very unlikely to have a Nurture Group in secondary, instead the school may put on special lunchtime clubs for children who struggle to make friends and have difficulties with social interaction.

If your child has an EHC plan (Education, Health and Care Plan) planning ahead will allow the annual review process and changing of named school to be completed on time.

These are some ways you can prepare for your child's transition to secondary school:

- ◆ Ask whether you can meet with the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) at the secondary school.
- ◆ Discuss the transition to secondary school during your child's annual review in year 5 or before to allow yourself more time to be prepared.
- ◆ Gather as much information about the individual schools as possible. Information you can access includes (some of these can be found on the school's website):
 - *The school prospectus*
 - *SEN information report or School SEN Offer*
 - *A copy of the school's Ofsted report*
 - *A copy of the school's policies and procedures (especially the SEN and bullying policy)*
 - *Talking to parents that send their children to the school*
 - *Talking to the teachers*

Before your visit

After you have read the information, you've accumulated and decided on the schools you think would be the best for your child, a visit to the school can give you a real understanding of the environment and support the school can provide for your child.

Things to consider:

- When would you want to visit (Going at different times through the day can give you a real sense of the school)
- Writing a list of questions that you might want to ask (look below at some suggested questions)
- Who you will be taking? (You may want to visit the school without your child, you could then plan a second visit with your child to get their view).
- Transportation (Is the school easy to get to?)
- Will you meet staff members who would be involved with your child?
- Will you be able to talk to parents of pupils that attend the school?
- Will you have a guided tour or are you allowed to wander around?

Questions you might want to ask before visiting the school:

- Will the size of the class suit your child?
- How will the school cater for your child's needs?
- How does the school support children with SEN?
- Does the school know anything about your child's disability?
- Has the school ever taught any other children with the same disability?
- Are all areas of the school accessible to my child?
- How will my child be supported outside lesson time?
- How does the school deal with difficult behaviour?
- How is bullying dealt with?
- How does the school help children mix and make friends?
- How does the school communicate with parents?
- When can I talk to my child's teacher/s?
- Can I have a copy of the school's policy on bullying, SEN and inclusion?
- Will my child be able to have extra visits to the school before they transfer and what arrangements will be made to help them settle in?

Visiting the School

Keep an open mind when visiting the schools and make sure to ask any questions you think might be crucial in your decision on whether you'd send your child there. All visits to schools are varied with a different process for each institution, check with your chosen school about the visiting process for children with SEN on an Open Day.

Constantly keep in mind questions such as:

- Do the staff and pupils look happy?
- Is the school accessible?
- Is there noise or complete silence?
- Do they have artwork and pictures on the wall or are the walls plain?
- What does the school do to support children with SEN?

After your visit

After you visit the school a reflective process should take place. This is where you can ask yourself and your child (if in attendance):

- Did I feel welcome at the school?
- Did the pupils and teachers seem friendly and helpful?
- Do I think my child would be happy at this school?
- Did the school answer all of my questions?
- Will my child get the support they need?
- Is the whole school accessible? (if applicable)
- Is the school easy to get to?
- Was it easy to communicate with the teachers and SENCO?
- Did the school show me what they do to help children with a variety of needs?

Naming a school on the EHC Plan

A parent has the legal right to request a particular school or express a preference for another placement e.g. specialist school, to be named in the EHC plan (Educational Health Care Plan).

Secondary placement will start to be discussed in the annual review in year 5. In Year 6 the annual review should be held early enough to have any changes and updates made to the EHC plan and the secondary placement named.

Once changes have been made following the annual review, the local authority must send you a draft of the updated EHC plan and will give you at least 15 days to give views and make representations on the content.

The local authority must:

- Notify you that during this time you can request a particular school.
- Advise you on where you can find information about schools.

Your local authority then assesses your plan to decide on what they feel is the best placement for your child, however they **MUST** consult with your choice of school.

The local authority can refuse your request of school if the school doesn't meet your child's needs based on these three factors;

- Can the placement meet the child's special educational needs and disabilities?
- Will the placing of that child have an adverse impact on the education of the other Children or Young People?
- Is there is a reasonable use of expenditure (resources)?

However, if the local authority refuses your request and there isn't evidence of one of the factors above you have the right to appeal this decision.

Further Information



Information: You may find it helpful to look at our other leaflets and information on our website, social media channels and through our workshops and courses. We have some downloadable resources. If you can't find the answers.



Advice: We provide unbiased information and advice about what the law says, the local authority's policies and procedures, and about the policy and practice in local schools or other settings. We do not take sides or tell you what to do, we will help you get the information you need to make your **own choices**.



Support: We can help you by **listening** to your views and concerns, whilst working with you to explore your options. We can help you with preparation for meetings, with letters, forms and reports and support you to have the confidence to **express your views**.

Useful Links

Ace Education (independent advice and information on state education in England).

Child Law Advice

(education law advice for families)

www.childlawadvice.org.uk

Contact (for families with disabled children) www.contact.org.uk

Council for Disabled Children (umbrella body for the disabled children's sector)

www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

IASS (information, advice and support services network)

www.cyp.iassnetwork.org.uk

IPSEA (national charity providing legally based information advice and support) www.ipsea.org.uk

Our Website www.cornwallsendiass.org.uk

SEND Code of Practice (explains the statutory duties of schools and local authorities)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

SEND Tribunals Service (organisation responsible for handling claims)

www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/send

