

Choosing a School

Choosing a school for your child can be a difficult process for parents, especially if your child has special educational needs. Take time to sit down with your child and discuss what is important to them in school. If they are in phase transfer from primary to secondary school, how do they think secondary will differ from primary. Make a list of those things you both find important, and as you visit the schools check how they match the list.

Things to Consider

- Location, will you be able to get your child to your preferred school on time every day. How will you get them there, walking or by bus?
- Are there siblings already in the school
- Are any of their friends hoping to go to that school
- Sport facilities
- Computers
- School results
- School discipline
- Subject specialism (Secondary)
- How the school takes care of its pupils (Pastoral Care)

Things to Consider when Visiting Schools

When visiting the school consider the following as you go round

The Welcome

- Greeting by staff/pupils/parents
- Is information provided on how to get around the school/who's who etc?

School Organisation

- How is the school day organised? Into departments? By age? By ability By subject groups?

- How might the school's organisation change as my child gets older?
- How often will my child change class or move around the school?
- How many children will be in my child's class?
- When and how often are children taught outside the classroom?
- How does the school arrange extra support for children who need it?
- Is the extra support usually provided in the classroom, individually, or in small groups?
- What health or medical facilities does the school have?
- If your child has difficulty walking: Will all areas of the school be accessible to my child, or will adaptations be necessary?
- Uniform - Is there any flexibility to the uniform, especially if your child has sensory issues
- What are the lunchtime arrangements

Staff Knowledge and Experience

- Does the school have any experience helping children with similar difficulties to my child?
- How many other children in the school have special educational needs? What kinds of needs do they have?
- How many staff are there in school? Teaching and Non-teaching special needs support staff?
- What training have staff had about special educational needs?
- How will the school ensure all staff know about my child's needs?

Communication and Support for Parents

- How will I be involved in the individual planning for my child's special educational needs?
- How often are written reports sent home?
- How will I be updated about what is happening in school?
- How are parents involved in school life?
- Does the school produce newsletters for parents?
- What sort of support and guidance does the school offer parents?
- Is there a parents' group I can join?
- What arrangements are usually made for transport to and from school?

- How will staff get to know my child before they start at the school?
- How will my child get to know the school, especially in the first few days after starting?

Assessment and Progress

- How is children's progress monitored and recorded?
- How regularly will my child's progress be reviewed? Who is involved in this?
- What happens if school staff feel my child is not making progress?
- What will happen if I feel my child is not making progress or if I have any concerns?
- What special arrangements exist for internal exams, tests, and SATs?
- What public exams can children take, and what is the success rate?

Student Support

- How are students looked after in school?
- Resources e.g. computers
- Does the school seem well resourced?
- What background information can I look at about a school?
- The School Prospectus
- The School Admissions Criteria
- The Behaviour Policy
- The latest OFSTED Inspection report
- The Special Educational Needs Policy
- The Equal Opportunities Policy
- The DoFE Achievement and Attainment table

Pastoral Care and Extra Curricular Activities

- Are there clubs run at lunchtimes or after school?
- How will the other children be helped to understand my child's special needs?
- How will my child be helped to make friends?

- How does the school help children to learn how to make the school a happy place? Does the behaviour system reward effort as well as success?
- What is the school's experience of bullying? How will the school prevent my child from being bullied?
- How will the school ensure my child can take part in all areas of the curriculum?
- How does the school ensure all children have an equal opportunity to take part in school trips?
- How will my child be encouraged to take part in out-of-school activities such as clubs and sports events?

What Feeling do you get?

- Does it feel like a friendly place to learn?
- Does it feel like your child would be happy?
- Does the school specialise in one or more subject areas? (Secondary)
- Is your child interested in/good at a specific subject?
- How does the teaching of a school specialist subject differ from other subjects or schools?

