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Choosing a school for your child

A guide for parents of children with Special Educational Needs

- Pick at least 2 schools to choose from so you have something to compare with.
- Consider how your child will travel to the school.
- Ask to be sent or to be shown the school prospectus, policies on Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Bullying/Behaviour, Complaints procedure, governors' annual report on SEN and most recent Ofsted report.
- Ask to visit school without your child initially, but if possible take someone with you who knows your child well.
- Ideally visit during school day at a time when you can observe both lessons and break time. Ask to meet the head, the SENCO and the class teacher if possible.
- Prepare a list of questions in advance. The questions which follow may be useful as a guide.

If your child/young person has an EHCP it may be useful to let the school know in advance and take a copy with you when you visit.

Pick out the questions you feel are most appropriate to your child.

1. Approximately how many children will be in my child's class?
2. What will the school do to make sure that all the staff know about my child's individual needs? Can the school show you that individual children are dealt with in a consistent way across the teaching team?
3. What specialist training does the staff have, including support assistants, and is this being kept up to date? Are there any other children at the school with similar special educational needs and what provision is made for them?
4. How much time does the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) have to devote to SEN work?
5. How is support organised for children with special needs? Is support usually provided in class? How do specialist SEN staff liaise with class or year tutors about individual children?
6. Are there particular needs my child has e.g. signing/medical conditions? Does the school have experience in this area?
7. Can I see some of the actual written records kept, such as Individual Education Plans or Provision Mapping, to give an idea about how carefully these are prepared and managed?
8. How will I be kept up to date about how my child is getting on at school? How will I be involved in planning for my child's needs? Approximately how often will the school hold meetings with me about my child?

9. What should I do if I have concerns about my child?
10. How would the other children be helped to understand my child's needs? How does the school make sure that all children are welcome and that differences are respected?
11. How would my child be helped to settle in school and to make friends?
12. How does the school celebrate children's success?
13. Are all areas of the school accessible to my child? If not, what does the school suggest?
14. How does the school help children learn how to behave appropriately?
15. Some children with SEN benefit from a structured, predictable environment. How closely does the school stick to a timetable? Are school rules made clear or is there an 'unwritten code of conduct' which a child with SEN may not pick up easily?
16. What support is there for children in the playground/at break times?
17. Statistically, children with SEN are more likely to be involved in bullying, either as victims or perpetrators, than children without SEN. How does the school deal with bullying?
18. How would the school make sure my child has the chance to take part in all areas of the curriculum, including school trips?
19. How would the school plan for a successful transfer to middle or secondary school for my child? At secondary level, what can the school tell you about how it approaches Transition Planning?

Finally, review your first impressions. Do all children at the school appear happy, friendly, and helpful? Could your child fit in here? Consider your child's difficulties and strengths. What is your child good at? Will they have the opportunity to develop their interests at this school?

Residential School

If your child will be attending a residential school you will have extra things to ask about, as suggested below. Try to meet the person who will have overall care of your child. Visit the room your child will sleep in and the bathrooms.

1. Who should my child go to if he or she is worried or has a problem? What happens if my child needs help or attention in the night?
2. What privacy will my child have?
3. What links will there be between the school and me, such as home visits or letters?
4. How and when will I be contacted about my child's progress, or if there is a problem?
5. How can I keep in touch with my child?
6. Will my child be able to join organised out of school activities such as Scouts, dance clubs, football teams? What will my child do if they are at school over the weekend? Will my child have opportunities to shop, cook, clean and play as he or she would at home?

After your visit, try to talk to other parents whose children attend the school. How helpful do they find the school when issues arise? Is there a parental support group for those with children with SEN? Keep a note of the strengths and weaknesses of the school as you see them. Perhaps your preferred school will be full. You can refer to your notes to help you decide your next preference, or whether you need to visit other schools.