



Moving on:

A guide for choosing a secondary school for your child

Follow this link to Birmingham City Councils information page about Secondary transfer:

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50151/schools_colleges_and_further_education/1901/sen_secondary_transfer_2020/2

In the pages that follow, we have provided information and guidance for the process of choosing a Secondary school. If you need any further advice, please contact the SEN department and we will be happy to speak to you.

Choosing a Secondary School for your Child

Choosing the right school for your child is a big decision for any parent. It can be a worrying time for pupils and parents alike. These worries can include your child having to get to know lots of teachers and the pressure of meeting fellow pupils, the size of the school, how they will cope with moving around for each lesson and travel to the new school. Getting the appropriate education is an important step in helping them to make the most of their abilities, as well as the chance to make friends and become involved in new activities.

It is important when planning the move from primary to secondary school, to ensure that all options have been thoroughly researched. Choosing the right school, one that will meet your child's needs, is essential and so it is never too early to start visiting local secondary schools to see what they have to offer.

What kind of schools are available for my child?

Choosing the right school may seem like a challenge at times, but making sure you know what you are looking for, and what is available, are two of the most important ways of deciding what you want for your child.

Every child has the right to go to a mainstream school. More children and young people with special educational needs are now being educated in mainstream schools with extra support. However, you, your child and the local authority may decide that a resource base within a mainstream school or a special school will better support your child's educational needs.

A resource base is a specialist provision within a mainstream school. All resource bases cater for children who can access a mainstream curriculum but who need additional support or small group work in order for this to be successful. Resource bases operate in different ways: children may attend a specific unit in the school for part or all of the school day, and/or they may receive focused specialist support in the main classrooms. They are all staffed with specialist teachers, support assistants and therapists with expertise in Speech and Language, ASC and Cognition and Learning who work in the base and with mainstream teachers.

Special education schools are designed to educate children with needs that cannot be met in a mainstream classroom. Most classes in special schools are small in size and many have a high level of staff support.

Choosing the right school for your child

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Speak to your friends and neighbours

Talk to your friends and neighbours who have children at local schools. Ask them what their experiences have been like, what their child thinks of the school and what clubs and activities they have been involved in.

Speak to other parents of children with a learning disability

Speaking to other parents of children with a learning disability can be a great way to find out information and share your experiences, as well as finding new sources of support.

How to find out information about schools

In England, Ofsted regularly produces reports on organisations that provide care and education for children and young people. Reading the Ofsted reports for schools in your local area will give you an idea of the standard of education they can provide for your child. The reports should be available from the school itself, or from the Ofsted website <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>

Look at the school's website which should include:

- School's local offer
- School prospectus
- Special educational needs policy
- Accessibility plan
- Disability equality scheme
- Home school agreement
- Behaviour policy
- Anti-bullying policy

Think about what you are looking for

Once you have an idea of the schools that might be suitable for your child, think about exactly what you are looking for from each one. You will want a school that offers your child a high-quality education, values their contribution to the school and gives them an opportunity to make friends and get involved in new activities.

You may also be looking for specific facilities and support to help your child get the most from their education.

Get support and advice

Finding the right school for your child can be a stressful time, so make sure you get the help and support you need. By talking to the professionals involved in your child's education it will support you in understanding the primary needs your child has and where they can best receive the support and education they require. The local authority will also put you in touch with a parent partnership service if requested. They can help you to prepare questions for schools and attend visits with you.

Arranging a visit to a school

Some schools also have open days, when members of the general public can visit and look around. These days might give you a better overall feel of the school. However, if your child has special educational needs, it is still a good idea to arrange a separate visit to discuss your child's individual needs and to find out what the school can offer.

Who will I meet at the school?

During your visit you will usually meet the head teacher and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). You may also meet the class teacher.

Should I take my child with me?

At some stage you should definitely take your son or daughter to schools you are seriously considering but it might be wiser to attend without them on an initial visit so that you are free to ask questions.

Preparing for a visit

Make a note of the questions you want to ask

It is a good idea to sit down before the visit and think carefully about the questions you would like to ask. You may want to write these down so you don't forget them. The questions will depend on your child, but you may want to know about:

- school staff
- teaching and support
- children at the school
- specialist support for children with complex learning disabilities
- specialist equipment
- out of school activities
- transport to and from the school

Talk about your child and their needs

Don't forget the staff at the school will also want to know about your child, for example, what nursery or schools they have been to, what type of special educational needs they have and what you are looking for in a school.

Get support for the visit

You may also want to take someone with you for support during the visit, such as a partner, friend or relative. If you do not have anyone to go with you, but you would like some support, you can speak to the parent partnership service. They can help you put together your questions and contact you afterwards to see how the visit went.

Take a good look around

Make sure you have a good look around during your visit, and ask to see the buildings and the playground. See if you can get a feel of the school, its general atmosphere and whether it feels positive and welcoming. Try to imagine your child in these surroundings - you need to feel comfortable that they will fit in and have their needs met. Are there other children who have similar needs already at the school? You also need to feel confident about the attitude and skills of the staff, and how flexible they will be when working with your child. You should also observe whether the children seem happy and well behaved.

Talk to a parent of a child already at the school

This will give you a chance to find out about someone else's experiences of the school, any problems they have had and how happy they are with the education their child is receiving. This is particularly useful if they have a child with a learning disability or similar needs to your son or daughter. You could also ask to speak to a parent governor from the school to discuss your situation.

Think carefully about your decision

After you have visited a school you will need some time to think about all the information you have received before deciding if it is right for your child or whether you need to visit any other schools. You may want to talk this through with someone else, for example a friend, advocate or professional.

Deciding on a school for your child is a big decision, so do not be afraid to get back in touch with the school to ask more questions or arrange a second visit.

What do I do when I have decided on a school?

Year 5 EHC reviews will take place during the Summer term. Although it is preferable to have a secondary school in mind before you attend the Year 5 transfer review it is useful to discuss the possibilities for secondary school with professionals who are involved with your child. There may be questions about whether your child will be able to manage in a mainstream school at secondary level (where the schools are usually much bigger), an appropriate resource base or if they may need a special school (where the schools are usually much smaller).

You will be sent an admission form from the local authority in the Summer term 2020, which needs to be handed in earlier than non-statement applications. This is because pupils with an EHC have higher priority than those without. In addition to considering mainstream schools you may wish to consider specialist provisions. You should discuss this with other professionals supporting your child, such as the SENCo and Educational Psychologist.

The local authority will consult with the school you have chosen to ensure that they can meet your child's needs. The local authority will make the final decision about your child's placement and you will be informed.