



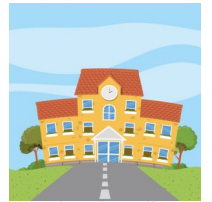
Choosing A School

When you visit schools, first impressions are crucial. You will get a feel for the atmosphere, the facilities and space, their attitude towards pupils and their approach to education. To get a clear picture of their knowledge, skills and experience though, you will need to ask specific questions.

It may be a good idea to create a list and write down their responses too, as this will build up a picture of each school you visit so that you will be better able to make comparisons.

First visit

Have a look at the school's website, where their special needs policy and SEND information report will be available to look at before you make your initial visit. At a mainstream school, ask whether you will be able to speak to the school's SENCO during the visit.



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If both parents can go, that's desirable, but if this cannot happen, it might be helpful to ask a friend or relative who knows your child to come too.

Don't feel pressured to take your child with you for the first visit. For some parents, taking their child with them will add to the stress involved and make evaluating the visit very difficult. Most schools, however, will want to meet your child before offering him/her a place, so a visit at a later stage may be best.

During visiting

You don't need to visit every school you hear about, but it may be a good idea to visit as many different schools as possible. This will give you a much broader picture of what is available and what features you think are important to your child's schooling experience. You may also find that something you would not normally have considered may actually be right for your child.



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This information will help you to make an informed decision, considering **ALL** options in preparation for the Local Authority (LA) giving you their final opinion. It is **impossible** to ask too many questions at this stage. You have made no commitment to the school, so don't worry about being labelled as an over-anxious parent. If you were buying a house, you wouldn't be embarrassed about asking questions and the same should apply to choosing a school.

After visiting

Following your visit, reflect on the notes and responses you made. Reflect on how you felt while looking around the school and talking to the staff. Be aware of your gut feelings. Does the school want your child? Was it welcoming, encouraging and knowledgeable? Could you picture your child within that school?



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The following questions may provide some useful guidance, but there may be other questions and concerns specific to your child that you may also wish to raise.

School environment

- How many pupils are at the school and how many are in each classroom?
- What is the staff/pupils ratio and level of support in class?
- What is the layout of the school ? (e.g. is it on one level, are there several buildings, are classrooms open plan/accessible?) Consider noise levels and distractions, and possible escape routes and exits out of the school for 'runners'
- Are there accessible changing facilities and toilets?
- How does the school manage toileting issues?
- Is there space in the classroom for any extra equipment your child may need? (e.g. extra space to organise work, a computer, wheelchair or standing frame).



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Teaching and learning experience

- Has the school signed up to the Essex Education Inclusion Strategy which reflects partnership working between school leaders and the Local Authority in developing a school-led approach to SEND across the system?
- Has the school experienced pupils with similar additional needs?
- What training do staff and learning support assistants receive around SEND?
- What facilities or resources do/will they provide to support **your** child's needs?
- When will you get support in order to plan to meet your child's needs?
- Is there access to specialist services/teacher/therapists?
- How does the school keep parents informed about the progress their children are making at school? Is there a home/school diary or similar?



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School and recreational

- Is there a quiet area/escape area for time out?
- Is there good supervision during unstructured time? The lack of structure and social nature may make it a prime time for social conflicts and behavioural problems.
- A buddy system is often helpful, does the school offer this?



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