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Information Sheet: 15

CHOOSING A SCHOOL FOR A CHILD WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

One of the questions we are most frequently asked is ***“how do I know that I’m choosing the right school for my child?”***. The answer is that you probably won’t know until you have tried it. This question is usually closely followed by ***“can you recommend a school?”***, and of course we are not in a position to do that because we don’t know your child, or have intimate knowledge of the schools in your area, or know what you are looking for in a school..... However, we can suggest a number of things you might want to think about or ask about when you are looking at schools, to help you make your decision.

HOW DO I CHOOSE A SCHOOL?

Finding a school that will suit your child:

- ✓ visit at least two schools so that you have something to compare
- ✓ start with local schools
- ✓ does the school already have all the things your child needs or could they be developed
- ✓ try to keep an open mind until you have looked at all the possibilities and spoken to the professionals involved with your child

Before visiting the school:

- ✓ make a checklist of all the things that are important to you and your child. This will help you to ask the right questions. (see the checklist below as an example)
- ✓ arrange to meet with the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) . If your child is transferring to secondary school you may like to meet the Head of Year or Head of Key Stage 3. Ask them to bring the school SEN policy, governors’ annual report on SEN, school prospectus, anti-bullying policy and behaviour policy to the meeting
- ✓ look up the school’s most recent OFSTED report on the internet
- ✓ decide if you want to take someone with you – perhaps a friend or your independent parental supporter
- ✓ take any relevant information about your child, such as their Statement, any educational psychology advice and copies of individual education plans.



Sample checklist (to be used for ideas)

- How is SEN provision organised in the school? (ask to see the school's SEN policy and the governor's annual report of SEN)
- Has the school experience of children with the same/similar needs as your son or daughter and how did they work with them?
- What kind of help would your child receive?
- Depending on your child's needs ask about:
 - additional adult support (e.g. learning support assistant, what the class teacher and SENCO do)
 - equipment/adaptations/materials
 - the way teaching would be organised, e.g. whole class, small groups, 1:1
 - SEN support services available to the school – e.g. therapists, educational psychologist, literacy support, support from other schools.
 - medical/personal hygiene support
- What is the school's behaviour policy? How does it apply it to children with SEN? If your child has behaviour difficulties, how would the school respond to this?
- How does the school deal with bullying?
- How does the school involve parents in school life? How will the school communicate with you about your child and his/her progress?
- How does the SENCO communicate information about individual pupils to teachers? This is especially important at secondary school where a pupil might be taught by 13-14 different teachers in a week
- Are there any after school activities/trips/holidays, and how would your child with SEN access these?
- If your child will need transport to school, ask for information on this.

Other things to look at –

- Do you feel welcome?
- Do the children look comfortable?
- If your child has any particular religious needs, would they be met?
- Do the classrooms look like places where children can learn?
- Does the school look under control?
- Does the school celebrate different cultures/religions?
- Are the displays current and interesting and do they seem to include pupils of all abilities?
- Do the staff seem interested in you and you child?


Remember, your own experiences of school may affect the way you see the school. Try to put these feelings aside and look at the school from your child's perspective.

If your child has a Statement of SEN and you are considering mainstream junior and secondary schools, you should be aware that you will be asked to express a preference for a school in **the September of the year before** they are due to move. You might therefore want to attend secondary open evenings in the autumn term of Year 5.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO “EXPRESS A PREFERENCE” FOR A SCHOOL FOR A PUPIL WITH A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)?

If your child has a Statement of SEN, the law says that you have the right to “express a preference” for the school you wish your son or daughter to attend. This means that you can tell the Local Authority (LA) which of the maintained schools in your area you would like your child to go to. A maintained school is one that belongs to or is managed by the LA, i.e. your local primary, secondary or special school, but not an independent or private school. The LA will then take your views into account when decisions are being made about which school can best meet your son or daughter’s needs. If your preference is for a mainstream school (not a special school) the LA has to agree unless it is “incompatible with the provision of efficient education for other children”¹.

If you are asked by the LA to express a preference for a school it is important that you do so either in writing or by telephoning your son or daughter’s case officer so that the details of your preferred school can be recorded in the relevant paperwork. That paperwork may be considered by special admissions panels that meet in the autumn term (junior and secondary transfer) and spring term (infants) to look at placing pupils in Surrey special schools and units. If this is the case for your child, the Year 1 or Year 5 Annual Review is the critical one.

 If your child is educated out of their chronological year group (for example in Year 4 when they should really be in Year 5 because of their date of birth) it is important to talk to your son or daughter’s current school and/or your case officer as early as possible.

At your son or daughter’s last Annual Review, there will have been a discussion about which school they should go to next. However, unless you had put the name of your preferred school in writing when you completed the Parental Report for the Annual Review, there may be no written record of the school for the LA to refer to.

If you do not know which school you prefer and are happy to wait for the outcome of the process, you should let the LA know that too, again by contacting your child’s case officer at your local education office.

Where can I find my Local Education Office?

North East Local Education Office	South Local Education Office
Address: Omnibus, Lesbourne Road Reigate, RH2 7JA Tel: 01737 737600 Area Special Needs Manager Amanda Hitchcock	Address: Omnibus, Lesbourne Road Reigate, RH2 7JA Tel: 01737 37600 Area Special Needs Manager Shelagh Green

¹ Education Act 1996 section 316 (3), as amended by SEN & Disability Act 2001
20/05/2010
Choosing School for SEN

North West Education Area Office

Address: Grosvenor House
 London Square, Cross Lane
 Guildford, GU1 1FA
 Tel: 01483 517900
 Area Special Needs Manager
 Carole Gill

South West Education Area Office

Address: Grosvenor House
 London Square, Cross Lane
 Tel: 01483 517900
 Area Special Needs Manager
 David Griffiths

Choice Advice

Choice Advice is a new service provided by Partnership with Parents in Surrey to parents and carers of pupils in Years 5 and 6 who want information and support when applying for a secondary school place for their child.

Preparing for secondary transition in Year 5 will give you extra time to consider all the options.

The Choice Advice Service is free, impartial and confidential.

What can a Parent Partnership Choice Adviser do?

- Help you through the secondary admissions' process
- Help you to complete the forms
- Provide impartial information about Surrey schools
- Help you to find out what schools can do to meet your child's needs
- Provide details about the curriculum on offer, including any school specialisms
- Explain about provision for pupils with special needs
- Inform you about the different admissions' policies that exist in Surrey
- Provide support through the admissions' appeal process, if necessary



The Parent Partnership Choice Adviser will **advise** and **help** you but **will not make decisions for you**. Choice Advice will make sure you have all the information you need to help you make decisions.

Using the Choice Advice Service **will not guarantee** that your child will get a place in your preferred school. The service will help you to consider all the options and make sure that you have thought about all the possibilities.

**To find out more, please contact:
 The Choice Advice Service, Partnership with
 Parents**

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