

Choosing a school

Questions to ask

These questions can help you to choose a school for your child or young person. You don't need to ask all of them. Pick the ones that are most relevant for your child and their needs.

Sometimes your own experiences of school, and your child's previous experiences, can affect how you see any new school. It can be hard to put these aside, but it's important to try and visit any new school with an open mind. It can sometimes help to take someone with you to give another view and to discuss things with.

The school

- How many children, teachers and support staff are at the school?
- What is the average class size?
- How are classes organised - open plan, individual classrooms, mixed age classes?
- What level of need and type of behaviour do other children and young people at the school have?
- How are children grouped within their school year - are they in ability or mixed ability groups?
- What is the balance between whole class/small group/individual teaching approaches?
- What facilities are there on the school site?
- Is there a full range of subjects on offer and at what level?
- Would your child's peers be working at the same academic level?

School life

- How does the school involve parents?

- How do school staff communicate with you and how often? How would you talk to staff about issues that come up for your child?
- Are there any after school activities/trips/residentials/holidays? If so, how would your child take part in these?
- How does the school deal with bullying?
- What is the homework policy for children with SEND and how will adjustments be made for them?
- How are your child's social life and relationships supported? For example, are there buddy or mentor programmes or social skills groups?
- What is the uniform policy, and can adjustments be made to it to meet your child's needs?
- What is on offer before and after school and is it inclusive – can your child take part?
- How are children supported at break and lunch times?
- How do the staff speak to the pupils and how do the children behave towards staff?

Starting at the school

- How will your child be introduced into school?
- What kind of transition plans are possible – could your child visit, spend time in school, meet staff, look around the site?
- Are staff from the school able to visit your child in their current school?
- Can these staff liaise with people already involved with your child?
- Could your child have a gradual start?
- Could your child have a mentor or buddy to help them settle in?

SEN support

- Does the school have experience of children with the same or similar needs as your child? If so, how do they work with them?
- Are there any staff in the school with a particular expertise or interest in the areas where your child has difficulties? If so, what training have they had?
- What Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision is in place? What kind of extra help would/could your child get?
- What kind of extra adult support is available, such as a teaching/learning support assistant?
- What kind of equipment/adaptations/materials is there?
- How is teaching organised? e.g., whole class, small groups, 1:1
- What SEN support services are available to the school? For example, an educational psychologist, literacy support and support from other schools, such as special schools.
- What kind of support is there for medical/health conditions?
- Can the school give personal hygiene support and if so, how would that work?
- What is the school's behaviour policy, and how is it applied to children with SEND? What kind of adjustments can be made for your child?
- If your child has behavioural difficulties, how would the school respond to them?
- How would your child's progress be reviewed/monitored, how would you be involved in this?
- How will the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) share information about your child with their teachers and support staff? This is especially important at secondary school where a pupil might be taught by many different teachers in a week or by supply teachers.
- If your child will have TA support, how will this relationship be developed, and support given?
- How do staff recognise and develop a child's strengths to build their self-esteem?
- What support is in place for Mental Health needs? If a child is struggling to attend due to anxiety – how would this be supported?

- Can a child take sensory, brain or movement breaks?

Other things to think about

- Does your child like it and do they feel as relaxed and comfortable as they could be?
- Do you and your child feel welcome?
- Do the children seem happy and engaged with their learning?
- If your child has any particular religious needs, would they be met?
- Do the members of staff seem interested in you and your child?
- How would your child get to and from the school? This can be an important thing to consider.

Need more information?

Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision

www.devon.gov.uk/support-schools-settings/ordinarily-available-inclusive-provision/

Devon County Council school transport

www.devon.gov.uk/educationandfamilies/school-information/school-and-college-transport

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