

# Information, Advice and Support Service



## Choosing a school

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### Before Visiting a School

You may already know what your child's needs are or how best they can be met.

You may want to talk things through with someone before you start visiting schools if:

- You aren't clear about your child's needs or how best they can be met.
- You disagree with what the professionals are saying.
- You disagree with the type of placement being offered.

You can contact the Information, Advice and Support Service (address on last page) to discuss the options available to you.

Before you visit a school you can find out more about the school to help you decide if it is worth visiting. You can call the school and ask about:

- The types of special needs the school can support (all Local Authority mainstream schools have to be inclusive and should be able to provide for any type of need).
- The way the school deals with special needs – this will be in the SEN (Special Education Needs) policy and/or the Inclusion Policy of the school, SEN Information Report or Local Offer. Ask them to send you a copy. You can also ask them to send you a copy of the school prospectus. This will help you to decide what questions you may want to ask when you visit the school.
- Links between home and school – do they have regular newsletters? Are reports sent home on a regular basis? You can ask them for copies of the most recent newsletters. Do they tell you what you want to know?
- Their most recent Ofsted report – you can ask the school for a copy of their most recent report but they may ask you to pay for the cost of photocopying it. It should also be on the Ofsted website if you have access to the Internet ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). See what the report says about SEN provision.
- Give the school a brief outline of your child's needs and ask for a visit to the school. Ask for time with the SENCO (Special Education Needs Co-ordinator),

learning support team member or teacher in charge of special needs in the school.

## **Visiting the School**

- You can visit as many schools as you wish before making a decision, not just the ones that are suggested to you.
- You can take a friend, relative or other supporter with you. You can also request the support of an Independent Parental Supporter from the Parent Partnership Service.
- It is important to find out from your child what sort of school they think they would be happy in, but you may not want to take them on an initial visit. You may prefer to wait until you are fairly sure which school you want your child to attend. You can take them to see all the schools if you wish.
- Think about what you want to know about the school before you visit. This will help you draw up a list of questions you may want to ask. The questions in this leaflet will help you to work out what you want to ask. They may not all be relevant to your situation and there may be others you wish to ask which are not on the list.
- Schools are used to having visitors and so won't be surprised by any of your questions. They won't be offended if you decide not to choose their school. They appreciate that many parents visit several schools before making a decision.
- NB – Special Schools are not responsible for their own admissions and cannot offer places to children. These offers are made by the Education Officer from the Special Educational Needs & Disability Team within the Local Authority.
- Don't forget to ask about all the non-SEN provisions within the school too!

## **Teaching and Learning**

- How many children are in each class? How many adults are in each class? What are they there for?
- What range of needs does the school meet? Can the school offer the provision your child needs?
- Is the school's SEN support an important part of the school? Are there other professionals based at the school? (e.g. Therapists)
- How much support does the school get from other professionals? (e.g. how often does the school nurse, or speech therapist, educational psychologist etc visit the school?)

- Will your child miss certain parts of the curriculum because of their SEN? How flexible will the school be with this? What lessons do pupils miss to receive extra help?
- What teaching methods are used? How long are the lessons and are support materials provided? Are the lessons in relatively short sections or are there long periods of dictation or copying?
- How are tasks adapted for those children who may have difficulty concentrating or writing for long periods? Are there individual learning programmes? (Ask to see a sample Individual Education Plan (See IEP leaflet) – is it what you would want for your child?)
- What learning support and classroom assistance would be made available to your child and how often?
- What specialist facilities, equipment and resources does the school use for SEN?
- What arrangements are made for school exams, tests and SATs (Statutory Assessment Tasks)? If your child is of secondary age, does the school offer GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education or another programme of external examinations? Does the school make use of concessions for exams such as extra time or providing a laptop or scribe if needed?
- How many children have special needs like your child's and how many teachers offer specialist support? If there is a larger number it will suggest that there is a great deal of support and that your child's difficulties will not be misunderstood or looked down upon by staff or pupils.

## **Behaviour Support within the School**

- How does the school's discipline system adapt to take account of the specific needs and difficulties of children? Is positive behaviour praised?
- What behaviour management programmes are in operation? Is there a planned programme to help build self-esteem? If so what is it?
- Are all staff briefed on potential triggers for outbursts by children? What plans are in place if an incident occurs in a class?
- Are there any quiet areas where children can go if they become stressed or anxious? Are there distraction free work areas?
- Is there any buddy system or peer support where an older child helps a younger child within school?
- Is there a learning mentor system in the school that can be used for your child if they need it? How does this work?

- What is the school's policy on bullying? How are children taught to deal with bullying and teasing?
- How does the school link with parents? (e.g. do parents take part in drawing up and implementing Individual Education Plans/Individual Behaviour Plans, are parents invited to reviews, is there a parents' group or coffee morning?)
- What extra activities does the school provide at lunchtime/after school? What are the play/recreational facilities like? What are the supervision arrangements?
- What will you have to provide for your child? (e.g. uniform, stationery, money for trips, events, extra activities etc.)

## **Specialist Provision**

- Ask the SENCO which SEN they feel the school supports particularly well.
- Does the school assess all children on admission to see what level they are at? How do they assess them? What do they do once they have the results?
- What facilities does the school have to support children with SEN?
- Are there any extra-curricular activities linked to SEN such as signing classes for non-hearing impaired children? How do they work to help communication between children with hearing impairments and those without?
- Are children given Individual Education Plans or set targets? If so how are the targets decided and by whom? What involvement do parents and pupils have? How are they monitored and reviewed?
- Does the school have links with any other school? In the case of a special school is there the possibility of partial or full inclusion/reintegration with a local mainstream school?
- What ICT (Information and Communication Technology) provision is available?
- Is there a member of staff who is trained to....(e.g. deal with epileptic seizures, help your child during PE (Physical Education) etc)?
- What provision is made for special diets?
- What arrangements are made for giving medicines and inhalers? What happens if your child is ill during school time?
- What is the school's policy on inclusion for school trips? How would they support your child on them?

## **Have Your Say**

Please let us know any comments you may have about this leaflet by contacting the Information, Advice and Support Service – Tel: 01325 405878 or email: [iass@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:iass@darlington.gov.uk)

Further copies of this and other leaflets are available from the Information, Advice and Support Service.

This leaflet is also available in large print on request.

## **Data Protection**

Although we are part of Darlington Borough Council, any record we make of your contact with us is confidential to the Information, Advice and Support Service except where you agree to us talking with other agencies, or if a child is at risk.

## **Further Contacts**

If you need any further information, advice or support please contact:

Information, Advice and Support Service  
13 Horsemarket  
Darlington  
DL1 5PW

Tel: 01325 405878

Email: [iass@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:iass@darlington.gov.uk)

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