

# How to Decide on a Suitable School



**Guidance for parents/carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**

Starting school for the first time or changing schools under any circumstance can be a very stressful time for both parents and children.

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with the necessary advice on how to effectively identify a school that can meet your child's needs, whether starting school for the first time or changing school for any reason.

### **We are often asked:**

#### *“Can the SEND Information Advice Support Service recommend an appropriate school for my child?”*

The SENDIASS Team is an impartial service, therefore we cannot recommend schools for your child. All children are different with different strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. You know your child best, so this makes you the most qualified person to choose a school for your child. However, we can help you by providing you with a list of things you can do and questions to ask each school you are considering.

We can also provide you with a list of all schools within the Borough. Please note that you can choose a school out of Borough.

#### **Things you can do:**

- Visit as many schools as you feel are necessary
- Read the schools' SEND policy, behaviour policy, accessibility policy, inclusion policy and any other you feel relevant for your child's age and needs (these will be found on each school's website)
- From your research of the schools policies, note down some questions to ask relevant members of staff when you visit the school.

In line with Havering's inclusive practice it is the intention of the Local Authority (LA) to try wherever possible to educate in mainstream schools. As a parent you have the right to choose which school your child attends, however there may be a chance that you will not get your first choice of school.

The school does not have to be within the Borough, but be aware of how your child will travel to and from school, in all weather conditions, as they may not be eligible for transport.

#### *“How do I find the most suitable school for my child?”*

All schools within Havering have achieved a high success rate with pupils with SEND. The ways in which they operate, vary from school to school, e.g. one school may cater heavily to hearing impairment and not as much on anxiety. There are no negatives as this increases the chances of finding a school that suits the needs of your child and makes it the 'best fit'

for you. In Havering there are a large number of specially equipped schools to support children.

### How can I prepare myself before a school visit?

You may find it useful to read some of the documents produced by the school, for example:

- The school brochure or prospectus
- The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy
- The Uniform Policy
- Other school policies such as the Behaviour Policy or the Equal Opportunities Policy
- The home/school agreement
- The Governors' Annual Report to parents
- A summary of the latest Ofsted Inspectors' report.



### How can I get the most out of visiting a school?

There is no need to visit all the schools, only those that you have a genuine interest in based on preference e.g. faith, single sex, distance, facilities, etc. Some schools hold open events by organising a visit during the school day when you (and if possible your child) can see the day-to-day routine in action. Things to think about:

- Do the staff have a positive attitude towards the pupils
- How the pupils behave in class and around school
- How classes are organised
- See the class/year group your child would be in
- How much of the school is accessible?
- Would adaptations be necessary (Hand rails, Ramps etc.)
- How easy is it to get to the school
- What behaviour management strategies are in place?
- Is there parking available in the school car park for your visit? Is this parking available to use all year round?



**Communicate**

Before you visit it may be helpful to list the questions that you would like to ask. It is important to note that schools that demonstrate an "I can" attitude, an enthusiasm to learn and be flexible, can sometimes work out even better than a school that has experienced a child with similar needs.

It is unlikely there would have been an opportunity to discuss your child's individual needs with the school during an open event. If this is the case make a follow up appointment with the schools' SENDCo. You need to think carefully about whether or not you choose to take

your child to this meeting. You may wish to take someone else with you such as a friend/relative.

### **Questions to ask the school:**

- What specific training have staff completed about SEND or specific medical conditions?
- How many children will be in the class?
- If additional support needs to be provided, how will this be delivered? (e.g. in the classroom, small groups or individually)
- How does the school assess work and monitor progress?
- Are all areas of the school physically accessible or would adaptations (ramps, handrails etc.) be necessary?
- What security measures does the school have in place?
- What time does the school start and finish? Does it change each day or are they the same?

Reading through written information will give you an idea of what the school is like and help you to identify any particular issues you might want to raise. Think about the values and beliefs that you and your family hold and whether they fit with those of the school. Think about your views on discipline and your religious beliefs and practices. Talking to other parents and friends can also be helpful in giving you a general picture.

After one visit you may be able to get a “feel” for the school, however, we recommend that you visit your shortlisted schools more than once. This is because many parents feel that after one visit they often get home and come up with more questions.

### **Things to discuss with your SENDCo.**

The school may wish to read any relevant paperwork relating to your child’s Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including medical conditions. Don’t forget to mention what strategies you find helpful at home to best support your child. This will enable the school to have a better understanding of your child and together you can assess whether the provision they offer is appropriate to meet your child’s needs.

You will need to feel confident that your child will be able to learn within that environment and that the school will be able to support your child and meet their needs outside of the classroom as well as inside it. It will also help if you are able to picture how it will work. Many parents worry about the pace of the schoolwork and that it may be too stressful for their child. Speak to the SENDCo if you have any concerns.

You should come away feeling that your child would fit into the school and would thrive. Ideally parents should be treated as partners in a team working together with the

professionals in the school for the good of the child. Your views and involvement should be equally valued.

It may be a good idea to take a notebook and pen, or a device to write notes with, so you do not have to worry about trying to remember every small detail you have been told.

### Questions to ask yourself about the school:

- On your first contact, did you feel as though it was welcoming?
- Were the children busy and engaged with their work?
- Did the classroom look pleasant and comforting?
- Did the school as a whole seem orderly and cared for?
- Were the hallways and toilet area clean and tidy?
- Were all areas of the school easily accessible for all students? Is this also accessible for your child?
- Were the displays up to date and include work of all children within the school?
- Did the staff seem interested in you and your child?
- Would you be happy to let your child spend their school days there?
- What was your child's view on the school?
- Are you confident the school can meet your child's individual needs? And if so how?
- Would the school be able to support your child's interests or strengths?
- Did you feel the school were understanding of your child's needs?
- Do you like the schools way of working?
- Would you feel comfortable approaching the school with suggestions or concerns?
- How would the school communicate with you? (E.g. email, daily messages, phone calls etc.)



Many parents become concerned over issues outside of the classroom such as classroom change, getting lost, being late, homework, detentions, clubs, bullying, break time / lunchtime, changes of teacher and making friends. You should make sure you speak to the schools' SENDCo to discuss these concerns if they are applicable to you.

### Will my child get transport?

It is important to take into consideration how your child is going to get to and from school. If the school is further than the Local Authority's statutory walking distance, you may be provided with transport. The walking distance is measured by the shortest available route and the legislation states that this walking distance is:



- Two miles for children under eight
- Three miles for children over eight

**Free transport will be provided if:**

- Your child has a severe or profound difficulty
- Your child attends a school which is deemed the most suitable, but which is beyond the statutory walking distance
- Children with SEND, although the question may be asked how severe the SEND is.
- Children whose route to school is unsafe
- Children from low income families.

If the Education Department agrees to provide transport, you will receive verification of this when you receive confirmation about which school has been allocated. If this is the case, shortly before the beginning of the Autumn Term you should receive details of who will be transporting your child to their new school.

**What else aids a successful transfer?**

You should work in partnership with the school to plan and prepare the support that your child needs prior to your child starting school. This will ensure a smooth transition into the school. Communication is key and it is important for parents to remember that if the school are not aware of any problems or concerns, they will not be able to provide support.



When transitioning from primary education to secondary education, the primary / junior school your child attends should organise a person centred review for your child and this will be the start of the transitioning process. Good communication during year 6 between both the primary school and the secondary school will allow your child to get the best chance at a smooth transition between schools. For some children with complex needs the process may need to begin at an earlier stage.

Before starting the transition from primary education to secondary, some secondary schools provide summer drop in sessions. This can provide stepping stones and help the children familiarise themselves with different aspects of their new school, this can include the building, staff, and resources. It is worth asking any potential new secondary school if they provide these drop in sessions.

**Before your child starts school**

- Take your child to or past the school and point it out to them
- Practice the journey with them a few times beforehand

- Visit at different points in the day, when the children are going to school, leaving and playing outside
- If the child knows anyone (relative or friend) that attends that school, ask them to share their experiences of the school
- Talk with your child about interests or any subjects they are looking forward to
- Get your child used to the school uniform and help them practice getting ready, e.g. putting on their own shoes or doing up a tie
- Help your child get organised and ready for school, e.g. showing them what will go into their school bag
- Talk through any of your child's anxieties around starting their new school and provide re-assurance.

### When your child starts school:

An important thing to do once your child has started school is to encourage them to talk to family and friends about what has happened during the school day, but do not force them to if they don't want to. Other things to do can include:

- Showing excitement for their successes
- If there are concerns, let the school know so you can work through them together
- Share any positive experiences with the school
- Keep a routine for both home life and school life
- Work in partnership with the school.

### Summary

1. Look around your local area for schools
2. Read through the potential schools' policies and procedures found on their websites
3. Create a school shortlist based on your research
4. Visit schools on your shortlist asking any questions that you feel is relevant
5. Re-visit schools that you have a 'feel for' if necessary and asking more questions
6. Once the school has been chosen, the transition process can start
7. Remember to keep communications open with the school
8. Praise your child for each success, however minor.

Depending on the circumstances and reasoning, you may also be advised to contact ACE (Advisory Centre for Education). The contact details are below:

Website: <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0300 0115 142

If you need any further information, advice and support, please contact us on:

Telephone: 01708 433885

Email: [SENDIASS@haverling.gov.uk](mailto:SENDIASS@haverling.gov.uk)

Or visit our website: <https://www.haveringsendiass.co.uk/>