
Starting a new school

This leaflet will help you to know what to expect and what you need to do when your child is starting school for the first time or moving on to another school.

Deciding which school you would prefer for your child

Parents and carers have the right to express a preference for the school that they would like their child to attend. Even schools within the same area can be very different.

It is important to remember that if you choose a school which is not the nearest to your home that can meet your child's needs, you may not be eligible for help with transport costs. You may like to speak to an adviser from SENDIASS Gloucestershire about this.

Can I look around the schools?

If you can you should try to visit all the schools that you and your child are interested in as soon as possible. This will give you plenty of time to make up your mind. Some schools will have open days and all schools will be happy to make an appointment for you and your child to visit. You can telephone the school office to arrange this, telling them that you would like to look around.

Is there any information I can read before visiting a school?

All schools can give you a copy of

- the school prospectus
- the most recent Governors' Annual Report to parents
- their SEN policy
- other policies, such as their behaviour or bullying policy
- their home-school agreement
- their most recent Ofsted Inspection report

Who should I speak to at the schools?

It is advisable to try and meet with either the Head Teacher or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) during your visit. You can then talk to them about your child's particular special educational needs (SEN).

What if I don't know what to ask the schools?

Head Teachers and Special Needs Co-ordinators are used to talking to parents about children coming into their schools, but you will need to ask them about how they will help with your child's particular needs. There is a list to help you with this at the bottom of this factsheet. An Adviser from SENDIASS Gloucestershire will be happy to help you make a list of questions for your particular child before visiting a school. We can also arrange for an Adviser to go along with you for support if you would find this helpful.

Will the school have the money to pay for the extra help that my child needs?

Most children with SEN are educated in their local mainstream school. All mainstream schools receive money for special educational needs support and resources. Schools can decide how to spend this money. This is called "delegated" funding because it is given (delegated) to schools by local authorities or the Education Funding Agency from money they receive from central government. More information can be found out from reading our factsheet called 'Funding for special educational needs in mainstream schools'.

What if I think that my child needs to go to a special school?

For a very small number of children who have very complex difficulties, a special school may be appropriate. If you think that this may be right for your child, you should speak to your child's current school or pre-school setting. You may also wish to discuss it with other professionals that know your child well. You may want to contact the SEN Casework Team at the LA to discuss this. All children at special schools will have either an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Will the school know about my child's special educational needs?

If your child has attended an Early Years setting (pre-school, playgroup, children's centre) regularly and has been receiving help for special educational needs, then this information will be passed on to your child's new school before they start. This will help the school to plan for your child's arrival and to ensure that the appropriate support is in place. The help provided at school may not be the same as they were receiving at pre-school, but it should still be appropriate to your child's needs.

If your child has not been attending an Early Years setting, then you will need to take any reports and paperwork about your child with you to the school of your choice and tell the school why you think that your child has special educational needs. This will help the staff to plan for your child's arrival.

How will I know how my child is getting on once they are at school?

Once your child is attending school, you will be able to keep in regular contact with staff, so that you know how your child is progressing. If you have any concerns, you can speak to your child's teacher/s or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)

at the school. You can also contact SENDIASS Gloucestershire.

The school will invite you to take part in decisions about your child, particularly what they need help with and the targets that they will be aiming for. It is also very helpful to let staff know if you have any concerns about progress, or if anything is happening at home that could affect your child at school.

If my child changes school will they receive the same help at their next school?

The help provided at your child's next school may not be the same, but it should still be appropriate to your child's needs. As children get older they are expected to be more independent. This is part of growing up. All new pupils are given help to adjust to the way in which the new school works. If your child's special educational needs make this more difficult, then additional help will be given.

What should I do before visiting a school?

- take a written list of questions with you if you think this would be helpful
- take a moment to write down the answers as you go. You may find this helpful afterwards. You may find that having a friend, family member or someone from SENDIASS Gloucestershire with you can be very helpful
- remember to note any feelings that you have as you look around and get answers to your questions

Questions you might like to ask

Not all the questions below will be appropriate so pick the ones that apply to you.

General Questions:

- How will you measure my child's progress and keep me up to date with how they are getting on?
- Who should I talk to if I have any concerns?
- Do you have regular parents' evenings? When would the first one be?
- How many children will be in my child's class?
- What are the arrangements for my child and I to meet with the class teacher before they start at the school?
- How does the teacher manage the different needs of all the individual children?
- If my child has several different teachers, how will they all know what his/her special needs are and how to help?
- Do you operate a Home to School diary system?

Helping children who have similar difficulties:

- How do you welcome children with difficulties like those of my child?
- Do you have other children in your school with similar difficulties?
- If so, what kind of help have you been able to give?
- Have any of the staff received specific training to meet the needs of my child or children that have similar difficulties?
- Have any of the staff got specific knowledge and skills about my child's needs or children with similar needs?

Helping my child:

- What help will my child receive?
- If my child needs a Teaching Assistant (TA) to help them for all or some of the time in school, how will you organise this before he/she starts at the school?
- Will we be able to meet beforehand?
- Will they have received any specific training?
- If they won't have received any specific training, how will you provide for my child in the meantime?
- What arrangements will be in place to support my child if the TA is not in school for any reason?
- If my child has physical/personal hygiene/therapies/medication, how will the school cater for this?

Homework:

- Will my child have homework?
- Will they have to do the same homework as everyone else?
- Will he/she get help in making sure they have it written down properly and understand what is required?
- What will happen if they are unable to complete the homework that has been set?

Children in my child's class:

- How are children encouraged to help each other here?
- What will you do to ensure that my child feels that they belong here and are fully involved in the school community?
- How will you ensure my child will be able to take part in all activities?
- How do you make children feel good about themselves and build their confidence?
- What if my child is bullied/bullies others?
- If my child finds it difficult to make friends, how will you help them with this?
- Do you have a friendship scheme in school such as a 'buddy bus stop'?
- Do older children in the school act as mentors for the younger children?

Break and lunchtimes:

- Are hot meals available, or do all children bring a packed lunch?
- What happens at break and lunchtimes – do children go out/stay in/play games?
- What if my child cannot cope with this?
- Will my child get help to manage break and lunchtimes? How will you do this?
- Is there a safe place for my child to go if they become upset or distressed during these times?

The start and end of the day:

- Where do I drop off my child in the morning?
- Will this be different on the first day?
- Can you make special arrangements for a child if they find this particularly difficult?
- What happens if my child is late to school because their special educational needs mean that we are sometimes late?
- What happens at the end of the day?
- Will someone speak to me about my child's day?

If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan, you will need to tell the SEN Casework Team at the LA which school you would prefer for your child. If you request a place at a special school the SEN Casework Team pass your request to a panel of professionals. Provided the panel agree that this school is appropriate for your child's needs, they will amend Section I of their Education, Health and Care Plan. If the LA does not agree to name your preferred school on your child's Education, Health and Care Plan, you may be able to appeal to the SEND Tribunal. SENDIASS Gloucestershire can give you information and advice about this.

Contact details for people who can help

Admissions Team

Telephone: 01452 425407

Website: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/schooladmissions

Email: school.admissions@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Further information, advice and support:

If you would like any further information, advice or support please contact SENDIASS Gloucestershire. This service is independent, impartial, confidential and free.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service
(SENDIASS) Gloucestershire
Messenger House – 2nd Floor
35 St. Michael's Square
Gloucester GL1 1HX



Freephone: 0800 158 3603



Direct Line: 01452 389344/5



sendiass@carersgloucestershire.org.uk



www.sendiassglos.org.uk



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