



Which school for my child?

A guide for Parents and Carers of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

At different times in every child's school life you, as parents and carers, are asked to decide which school you would like your son or daughter to go to. For example:

- when your child is first assessed for an Education, Health, Care Plan (EHC plan).
- when their current EHC plan is being amended, for example because they have reached the age where they need to change schools.

You need to be closely involved in helping to decide what educational provision your child will need.

This fact sheet is intended to help you in expressing your preference for a particular school for your child. However, most of the information will be useful in considering schools at other times.

Can I choose my child's school?

A parent can ask for any of the following in section I of the plan.

- a maintained school.
- a maintained nursery school.
- an Academy.
- an institution* within the further education sector in England.
- a non-maintained special school.

You have some choice but, by law, the Local Authority (LA) must be sure of the following things:

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- the preferred school is suitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs.
- the child's attendance at the school would be compatible with the provision of efficient education of the children with whom the child would be educated, and
- the efficient use of resources.

Where can my child go to school if he or she has special educational needs?

- Mainstream school - with extra help or provision. Most children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be able to go to their local mainstream school. They will be taught with children of their own age but receive extra help from their class teacher, a teaching assistant and sometimes a specialist teacher for some of the time. This also includes Academy schools.
- Enhanced Resource School (ERS) – this is a mainstream school with additional resources for some children with EHC plans. Children in Enhanced Resource Schools are integrated with their mainstream friends but have access to more specialist support and staff when appropriate.
- Special School – all children attending this type of school will have an EHC plan. A special school will have smaller classes, more staff and specialist teachers. Some experience in a mainstream school may be part of the children's education.
- Independent Special School – a private (fee-paying) school which has been approved by the Department for Children Schools and Families to take children with special needs with EHC plans.

In Derbyshire each of the Enhanced Resource and Special Schools provides for a particular group of special needs and age group.

Remember that all children are individuals with individual needs. Schools are also individual with their own individual strengths and ways of working. It is important to find a school which you think will best match the needs of your child, bearing in mind practical issues such as transport and any other children in your family.

You can find out more about schools on the [Derbyshire Local Offer website](#).

Will transport be provided?

How your child is going to get to and from school is an important part of considering the possible alternative schools.

The Local Authority has a transport policy which applies to all children and will not provide transport to a school which they consider to be within walking distance. This is considered to be two miles for children under 8 and three miles for children aged 8 and over.

If you choose a mainstream school other than your local school, the LA won't normally provide transport if they feel your nearest school is equally able to meet your child's needs. They may agree to name your preferred school on the EHC plan, but you will be expected to make your own transport arrangements. There may be some exceptions to this, for example if your child has walking difficulties or to walk would be unsafe.

Although transport is not usually written into Derbyshire EHC plans, in most cases, transport is provided to Special Schools or Enhanced Resource Schools if they are more than three miles from your home or in special circumstances if less.

There is a right of appeal to the Local Authority against a decision not to provide transport.

What should I do before I visit?

Go through the written advice you have been given about your child from any involved professionals. If your child has an EHC plan think about the information that is included in it.

Make a list of all your child's strengths and weaknesses and of the things that are important to your child and your family.

Talk to the professionals who know your child and ask them what kinds of things they think you should look for in any school you go to see. Professionals will not usually recommend a particular school but may advise on the kind of school that would be suitable.

You may want to contact the school and ask for their brochure, policies and most recent governors report. You may be particularly interested in their SEN or Behaviour Policies and their Accessibility Plan.

You could take a look at the school's most [recent OFSTED report](#).

You can use all of this information to help you decide which school would best suit your child.

What should I do when I visit a school?

Decide on two or three schools you would like to visit and contact them to make an appointment. Looking at too many schools to begin with will be confusing.

When visiting a school, try to get to talk to the staff who would be most involved with your child for example the class teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). Where possible try to visit during school hours so that you can see the school in action, particularly the class your child will be in.

It is a good idea to take a copy of your child's EHC plan or some other recent summary of your child's special educational needs with you when you visit a school, this will help the school staff to talk to you about how they can help your child.

Before you visit, make a list of all the questions you want to ask. You could use some of those in this fact sheet and add some of your own. Don't be afraid to ask direct questions about what the school is able to provide either during the visit or by contacting the school afterwards if something new occurs to you.

Think carefully about whether you want to take your child with you on the first visit and discuss this with the school. It may be better to take your child at a later date once you have decided on the school you prefer, or the Authority have agreed to place your child there.

Do you know other parents there? The school might be able to put you in touch with other parents and you could talk to them about the school. You could also talk to a Parent Governor.

For children who have an EHC Plan, the LA makes the decision about a place at a maintained school. School staff cannot tell you whether or not a place is available for your child.

What should I do after the visit?

Consider the answers you have received to your questions and how well you feel that the schools you have visited could meet your child's needs.

If you are undecided you can ask for a second visit or contact the school to ask more questions. You may want to look at other schools of a similar type.

Once you have found the school you prefer then you can let the LA know, either by sending back the reply form sent with your child's draft plan or by contacting your SEND team admin assistant.

Examples of questions you might want to ask

Your questions	What the schools say
Does the school have any experience of helping children with similar difficulties to my child?	
How often would my child change class or move around the school?	
How many staff are there in the school? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching• Non-teaching• for supporting special needs?	
What training have Staff had about special educational needs?	
What does the school do to make sure that all staff would know about my child's individual needs?	

Your questions	What the schools say
How many children would be in my child's class?	
How would other children be helped to understand my child's special needs?	
How would my child be helped to make friends?	
When and how often are children taught out of the classroom?	
How does the school arrange extra support for children who need it?	
Is the extra support usually provided in the classroom, individually or in small groups?	
How does the school help children to learn how to behave and make the school a happy place? Does the behaviour system reward effort as well as success?	
What is the schools experience of bullying? How would the school prevent my child from being bullied?	

Your questions	What the schools say
How would the school make sure my child has the chance to take part in all areas of the curriculum?	
What happens if school staff feel my child is not making progress?	
What would happen if I feel my child is not making progress or if I have any concerns?	
How do you make sure that all children have equal opportunities to take part in school trips?	
How often are written reports sent home?	
How would I be involved in the individual planning for my child's special educational needs?	
How would I be kept up to date about what is happening in school?	
Does the school produce newsletters for parents?	
Is there a parents' group?	

Your questions	What the schools say
What health or medical facilities does the school have?	
How would you get to know my child before they start at your school?	
How would my child get to know your school, especially in the first few days after starting?	
(If your child has difficulty walking) Are all areas of the school accessible to my child, or would adaptations be necessary?	

Who can I contact if I need further help or advice?

Parent / Carer Advice line
01629 533668
Staffed Monday – Friday 9.30am - 3.00pm
Email: ias.service@derbyshire.gov.uk

Leave a message and all calls and emails will be returned as soon as possible.

Other factsheets can be found on our website.

[Derbyshire Information Advice and Support Service for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities website.](#)

Or you can use **[our online contact form.](#)**

If you, or someone you know, would like a copy of this information sheet in large print, an audio version or in languages other than English, please contact us.

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