

# Choosing a School for an Autistic Child

Every autistic child is unique, and every school is also different. This information sheet is designed to help you think about whether a school is suitable for your child. Take time to consider these wider questions.

- What do you want from your child's education?
- What kind of support does your child need?
- What are your child's strengths?

Think about what you think a good education for your autistic child means, and what they need to make progress and fulfil their potential.

## Visiting the school

### Physical layout

Size and layout matter.

- If your child has a lot of sensory differences and spatial awareness difficulties, look for a school building that is not too big and is easy to get around.
- Be aware of narrow corridors and staircases where they could get jostled.
- Noisy, open plan classrooms may also not be the best environment for an autistic child. Acoustics, lighting, and good ventilation are all important considerations.

## **Ethos and attitudes**

From observing pupils and staff around the school and talking to them, consider what sense you get of the atmosphere in the school.

- Is it friendly, warm, and welcoming?
- Are staff interested and invested in the students?

Does the school ethos seem to suggest a rigid approach to children and their education, or is there some flexibility and a sense of doing what they can to value every pupil and draw the best out of them? It is people that make a school caring, accepting and understanding. Attitudes are what count in a school that meets the diverse needs of autistic children.

- What attitudes do you see as you move around the school?
- How do the staff speak to the students?
- How do the students behave towards staff and amongst themselves?
- Are you confident your child would feel safe?
- How does the school explain autism to their students?

## **Curriculum**

Every child has the right to experience a broad and varied curriculum, and you will want to see evidence that what is on offer will maximise your child's potential and motivation. You want to know that they are enjoying learning and making appropriate progress.

- Ask about what support is available for your child's specific needs.
- Ask how the curriculum is broken down differently for individual pupils, and how the school ensures that it plays to each child's strengths to encourage engagement and self-esteem.

## **Classroom activity**

All subjects, teachers and students vary, so there is no easy way of determining in a brief walk around the school whether students are interested in what they are learning and achieving lesson goals appropriate to their ability. However, it is possible to observe whether classroom activity seems purposeful, whether there is positive relationship between teacher and pupils, and how classroom staff are supporting activities. Look around you:

- How do pupils know what they are doing, why they are doing it, how long for and what is happening next?
- Are they expected to follow mainly verbal instructions, or is there evidence of visual support?

## **Getting help**

Ask to see the school's SEN policy to find out how arrangements are made to assess the needs of individual children, to provide appropriate support and monitor progress. Consider asking:

- How communication between staff and parents is facilitated?
- How will the school listen to the child's views?

## **Making the decision**

If a school seems reluctant to accept your child when you have explained their needs, ask yourself if this is the right school for your child. Visit several schools, if possible, and compare their facilities and approach. Take your time in making your decision and talk to other parents. What is right for their children may not be right for your child, but it may give you important information to think about.

## **Choosing a school for an autistic child with an EHCP**

If the child has an EHCP then parents/carers have the right to request a particular education setting be named in the plan. Depending on what type of school is requested, the LA has different rights and duties in response. More detailed information can be found on the IPSEA website in the resources suggested below.

### **Moving from primary to secondary school**

Students with an EHCP do not have the same admissions process. The LA must amend their EHCP and name the new school by 15th February in the year that the transfer takes place.

### **Useful resources**

**<https://www.ipsea.org.uk/Pages/Category/get-support>**