

Choosing a school

This factsheet explains:

- the different settings children with additional support needs may be educated in
- what mainstream and special schools offer
- points to consider when deciding about a school for your child.

If you have a child with additional support needs, you may want extra information and help with choosing a suitable school. You may be involved at ‘transition’ times, when deciding which school would best meet your child’s needs. Transition times include when your child moves from nursery to primary school, from primary to secondary, and finally, leaves school. Your child may also need to move schools if you move home, particularly to another local authority area. This factsheet provides practical information to help you choose the right school for your child.

It is good practice for the local authority to ask you to be part of the planning process, and to take your views into account during transition times. It is also good practice for the authority to ask your child for their views and to take these into account when thinking about a change in their education.

If your child cannot understand decisions or what the different choices may mean to them, you can speak on their behalf.

Types of school in Scotland

Education for children with additional support needs is provided in several settings.

Most children in Scotland, including children with additional support needs, will attend their ‘catchment’ school or another local mainstream school (see page 2 of this factsheet for more information on catchment areas and mainstream schools). But, in exceptional circumstances, mainstream schooling may not be suitable for a child. These circumstances are:

- where a mainstream school would not suit the child’s ability or aptitude
- where providing education in a mainstream school would negatively affect the learning of other children in the school
- where placing the child in a mainstream school would cost an unreasonable amount.

In these situations, children might be educated in one of the following settings:

- mainstream schools with special units or learning bases/centres
- special schools
- split placement – attendance at both a mainstream school and a special school, each for part of the week
- independent residential special schools
- grant-aided schools
- home- or hospital-based education.

You can find out more about different types of school in the ‘Choosing where your child will be educated’ section of **The parents’ guide to additional support for learning**.

Even if the exceptional circumstances described above do apply, an authority can still provide education for a child in a mainstream school. But this would only happen after they have taken into account your and your child’s views.

Mainstream education

Mainstream schools are schools that most children will attend. Each mainstream school has a ‘catchment area’ that is fixed by the local authority. The catchment area that relates to your child will depend on where you live.

Mainstream schools have a duty to provide support for pupils who have additional support needs. They should aim to include all pupils in all aspects of school life.

Special education

Special schools offer a range of services that are usually not available in mainstream schools. They provide much more help for children who have complex additional support needs such as behaviour problems, learning difficulties, or physical or sensory disabilities. They are often staffed by specialist teachers and can offer a range of education and therapies.

Some mainstream schools have special units. These offer some of the services that would be provided in a special school but on a smaller scale.

Special schools and mainstream schools often work closely together, to provide a variety of support for children and young people.

Units or flexible education

Attending a special unit or learning base attached to a mainstream school or a split placement may seem to offer the best of both worlds, with each offering benefits. However, it is worth taking time to make sure these options would be in your child’s best interests. For example, it is a good idea to find out how much time your child will spend in the special unit away from a mainstream class. This can vary a lot depending on the school and education authority policy. Also, a split placement may be hard if your child has difficulty adjusting to change and meeting new people.

Inclusion

Wherever your child is educated, they should feel included, engaged, supported and involved. The school should make sure it helps your child achieve their fullest potential.

The school should give your child opportunities to participate in all aspects of school life, including classroom work, break times, school trips and other activities.

The learning environment is important in helping pupils feel included and supported. Your child should be allowed to learn in an environment that best meets their needs.

Your child should have the chance to say how they would like the school to educate and support them. The school should also listen to your views and take account of information you provide.

The school must identify which of their pupils are struggling to do well. It must put in place adequate and efficient support to help them do the best they can at school. It must also keep under review any support provided. See our factsheet **Additional support for learning and disability rights** for more information on schools' duties to provide support.

Moving schools

If you feel that your child is not in the right type of school for them, the first thing to do is discuss this with the local authority.

If you cannot agree the choice of school with your local authority, you can make a placing request to the school you would like your child to attend. More information can be found in our **Placing requests** factsheet.

Points to consider

Choosing a school for your child can seem difficult. Take time to think about all the available options. You may wish to talk about the options with staff currently involved in supporting your child. It is important you feel confident that your child will be going to a school that can meet their needs, and where you can discuss their progress with school staff. It is very important that your child will be happy at the chosen school.

Your child may have their own preferred choice of school. When deciding on a school, it is important that your child feels included in the decision-making and goes with you on school visits where possible.

You may find it helpful to talk to other parents of children with additional support needs. However, every child is different, and the best choice of school for one child might not be the best for another.

If your child has specific needs, such as a visual or hearing impairment, a range of specialist services may be provided by different agencies, which can add to the support your child receives at school. Find out more from Enquire factsheet: **Who provides extra support for children's learning**.

It is also important to remember that the support your child receives will change depending on the outcome of reviews and your child's changing needs.

What to think about when visiting a school

When looking for a school for your child, the first place to look will normally be your local school. Find out if it can offer what your child needs before considering other schools.

Before you choose a school, it is a good idea to visit potential schools, perhaps with someone who knows your child or the education system well and can help you decide.

Some of the things you may wish to consider when visiting a school are:

- distance from home and transport arrangements
- which school your other children attend (if applicable)
- general accessibility of the school building and state of repair
- accessibility of toilets
- number of stairs
- class size
- playground security and supervision
- the school's additional support needs policy and discipline policy
- if the school has any specialist resources your child needs
- if the school has previous experience of children with additional support needs.

Every school should be able to give you a handbook stating its policies, values, aims and rules. The handbook can also give you some information on the school's approach to additional support for learning.

Examples of questions to ask during a visit:

- How many children are in a typical class?
- How big is a typical classroom (thinking about space for specialised equipment)?
- How much help do the teachers have, (such as classroom assistants, learning assistants or additional needs auxiliaries) and how is this help organised in the school?
- Are there any other children with additional support needs in the school?
- How can the school encourage my child to make friends and join in activities with other children?
- How will the school organise support for learning or other extra support my child may need, such as speech and language therapy?
- What kind of personal and social development will the school provide in such things as daily living skills?
- What are the school's arrangements for children who need medicine or medical support?
- What are the arrangements for transferring to the local secondary school?
- What is the best way to share information about my child (such as home/school diaries)?
- How will the school ensure my child is supported and progresses in the long term (for example do they use staged intervention approaches and specific learning plans)?

Where to find out more:

Factsheets:

Enquire factsheets look in more detail at a range of topics relating to additional support for learning. They also include links to other helpful resources.

www.enquire.org.uk/publications

Enquire factsheet: Planning children's and young people's learning (2018)

Enquire factsheet: Placing requests (2018)

Enquire factsheet: Who provides extra support for children's learning (2018)

Enquire factsheet Additional support for learning and disability rights (2018)

Publications

The parents' guide to additional support for learning, Enquire (2018)

Choosing a school: A guide for parents, Scottish Government (2010), available as web text only from: www.gov.scot/Publications/2010/11/10093528/0

Websites

There is a directory of all schools in Scotland, including local authority and independent schools on the Education Scotland website. For each school it provides contact details, links to school websites where available, and other useful information:

www.education.gov.scot/parentzone/find-a-school

ENQUIRE

Helping you understand additional support for learning

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. We provide independent and impartial advice to parents and carers, to practitioners in education, social work and health services, and to children and young people themselves.

www.reach.scot offers advice to young people struggling at school. With practical tips on what can help and young people sharing their views and experiences on all sorts of life issues, Reach offers the 'go-to' source of advice to help pupils make the most out of their education.

This factsheet has been awarded the Clear English Standard.



Contact details

Enquire, Children in Scotland, Level 1, Rosebery House,
9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

Helpline: **0345 123 2303**
(Access to interpreters through Language Line)

Office: 0131 313 8800

Email: info@enquire.org.uk

www.enquire.org.uk

Enquire factsheet: Choosing a school © Enquire October 2018



Enquire is managed by Children in Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government