

# School placements

This factsheet explains:

- the different types of school that pupils with additional support needs may be educated in
- how school placements are arranged
- points to consider when choosing a school for your child
- your right to make a placing request to a school of your choice, and how to do this

## Types of school in Scotland

Most pupils with additional support needs will attend a mainstream school and receive the support they need there. Some pupils with additional support needs might attend a special school, a specialist support base or unit attached to a mainstream school, or they might attend a combination of these. Some pupils will attend different types of school at different stages of their education.

All pupils with additional support needs who attend schools run by local authorities (or who have been placed in another type of school by a local authority) have a right to receive the extra help they need to do the best they can at school.

If you choose to send your child to an independent school, or to educate them at home, your child's rights to extra support with their learning will be different. Find out more in our factsheets on [Independent schools and additional support for learning](#) and [Home education and additional support for learning](#).

For information about nursery placements, see our factsheet on [Additional support for learning in the early years](#).

## Mainstream schools

Most pupils attend mainstream schools that are run by a local authority. Mainstream schools can cater for pupils with a wide range of additional support needs. They have a duty to provide extra help for pupils with additional support needs and should make sure all pupils can be included in all aspects of school life.

## Special schools

Special schools offer a range of specialist services not usually available in mainstream schools to pupils with more complex needs. They provide specific help for pupils with particular additional support needs, such as learning disabilities, behavioural problems, or physical or sensory impairments.

They are often staffed by specialist teachers and offer a range of services, facilities and therapies. Classes tend to be smaller than in mainstream schools.

Some special schools are run by local authorities, others receive grants from the Scottish Government (grant-aided special schools), and some are independent. Independent special schools are all funded differently, for example by charities, donors, or other organisations. Local authorities can place pupils with additional support needs at any of these types of special school.

## Residential special schools

Some special schools have a residential option, where pupils may spend all or part of their week staying at the school. This will usually be for pupils with complex educational needs and extensive care needs.

## Support units or bases

Some mainstream schools have support units or bases. These offer some of the services that would be provided at a special school, but on a smaller scale.

The way that support units and bases are run can differ between different local authority areas, and between different schools. For example, pupils might:

- be taught full time in a support base
- have some lessons in the support base and some in mainstream classes
- not receive any teaching in the support base, but instead have it as somewhere they can go if they are struggling in their mainstream classes
- receive support in mainstream classes, provided by staff from a support base
- have some combination of the above.

## Other options

### Split placements

Some pupils benefit from having a split placement, where they attend a mainstream school for some of the time, and a special school the rest of the time, so that they can access some of the specialist services there. This kind of arrangement is sometimes referred to as 'flexible' or 'shared' provision.

Whether this may be an option for a pupil can depend on things like how geographically close the two schools are, and how the pupil adapts to change and meeting new people.

Some older pupils attend school some of the time and fill the rest of their timetable with a college placement, or vocational opportunity.

### Hospital- or home-based education

If a pupil is unable to attend their usual school due to ill health, the local authority must make alternative arrangements so that they can continue learning. This may mean being educated out of school, for example at home, or in a hospital or hospice if they have been admitted for a period of time.

## The 'presumption of mainstreaming'

Local authorities have a duty to provide education in a mainstream school, unless certain exceptions apply<sup>1</sup>. This is known as the 'presumption of mainstreaming'. The circumstances where education can be provided in schools other than mainstream schools are:

- where a mainstream school would not suit the pupil's ability or aptitude
- where providing education in a mainstream school would negatively affect the learning of other pupils in the school
- where the cost of placing the pupil in a mainstream school would be unreasonably high.

If one or more of the exceptions apply, the local authority can still provide education in a mainstream school, but not without considering the views of the pupil and their parent(s).

Some parents may worry that their child will not get the support they need in a mainstream school. All mainstream schools have a duty to support and include pupils with additional support needs and can offer a wide range of supports and adjustments for pupils with different needs.

<sup>1</sup>Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

## Support and inclusion

Whatever type of school your child attends, the local authority has legal duties to:

- make sure education is directed to developing pupils' personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential<sup>2</sup>
- identify which pupils have additional support needs, and provide them with the support they need to benefit fully from their education<sup>3</sup>
- advance equality of opportunity
- prevent discrimination against pupils because of disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation
- make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled children to avoid putting them at a disadvantage<sup>4</sup>
- plan to improve the accessibility of their schools<sup>5</sup>
- consider the wellbeing of children and young people<sup>6</sup>.

Find out more in our factsheets on [Additional support for learning: key facts](#) and [Inclusion, equality and wellbeing](#).

## How are school placements usually made?

Every mainstream Scottish school has a 'catchment area' fixed by the local authority. Pupils who live in the catchment area for a school will normally attend that school – known as the 'catchment school'. Most pupils with additional support needs will attend their catchment school. Your local authority is responsible for making sure that your child either has the support they need to attend their catchment school, or is offered a place at a different school.

Local authorities should base decisions about which school your child should attend on your child's specific needs, the support they need to help them fully benefit from their education, and where this can be provided. They should take account of your views and involve you fully in the process. They should also ask your child for their views and take these into account, unless your child cannot understand decisions or what the different choices may mean to them.

<sup>2</sup>Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

<sup>3</sup>Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended

<sup>4</sup>Equality Act 2010

<sup>5</sup>Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002

<sup>6</sup>Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Most decisions about school placements are made in the year before children start primary school or move to high school. However, pupils can also move schools at other times, for example if the family moves home, or their current school is no longer able to meet their needs. Whenever a pupil moves school the local authority must consider the pupil's individual needs.

Decisions should be made in good time so that your child's move into a new school can be planned well in advance. As part of the transition planning process, you and the professionals working with your child should discuss whether you think your child's needs can be met at their local catchment school, and if not, what other options there are locally. The professionals who work closely with you and your child will be able to give you advice and help make sure the right arrangements are made for your child.

Find out more in our factsheets on [Planning for starting school](#) and [Planning for moving to high school](#).

### **If your child will be going to their local mainstream school**

You and those working with your child should discuss what support your child will need at their new school. It is useful to have joint meetings with your child's current nursery or school, plus staff from their new school. This can help to make sure that the new school has all the information they need to plan for supporting your child.

### **If the local mainstream school would not be suitable for your child**

In most local authorities, there are panels of people that make decisions about school placements for children with additional support needs. Usually, someone working with your child, like someone from their nursery or school, or an educational psychologist, will refer your child to one of these panels. You should get the opportunity to contribute your views (for example, by sending in a written statement), but parents do not usually attend these panel meetings. The local authority should then let you know what school placement they will offer your child.

Speak to your child's health visitor if your child is in nursery, or the person responsible for additional support for learning if your child is in school, if you think they need a place at a school other than their catchment school.

### **If you do not agree with the school your child has been placed in**

You should start by raising your concerns with the local authority. If you are not able to reach an agreement with them, you have the right to make a 'placing request' to a school of your choice. See the '**Placing requests**' section later in this guide for more about this.

## Once your child is in a school

The decision should be reviewed regularly to make sure that the school continues to meet their needs. The support that your child receives should also be kept under review.

## Choosing a school for your child

If you have a child with additional support needs, you may want extra information and help with choosing the school you would like your child to attend. Choosing the right school can seem difficult, so it is important to take time to think about all the available options. You should 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.

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.

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.

The first place to look will normally be your local catchment school. It is best to find out if it can offer what your child needs and discuss this with the professionals working with your child, before considering other schools.

## What to think about when visiting a school

It can be useful to visit potential schools, perhaps with someone who knows your child or the education system well and can help you decide. You may want to bring your child on the visit, or you may decide to visit on your own first.

Check whether the school will allow a visit, and always make an appointment. Every school should be able to give you a handbook that explains its values, rules and policies. This will usually include some information about the school's approach to additional support for learning.

Depending on your child's needs, you may be particularly interested in one aspect of the school, but try to get a feel for the whole school. As well as access to a good education, it is also important to find out about other opportunities your child will have, for example to make friends or get involved in new activities.

Here are some things to think about when visiting a school:

- How does it feel when you first enter? Does it feel positive and welcoming, and could you imagine your child feeling happy in the school?
- How would the school help your child to settle in and feel safe and welcomed?
- Has the school had experience of supporting a child with similar needs to your child?
- Is the school environment accessible for your child?
- How inclusive is the school?
- How many pupils are in a typical class, and how big are the classrooms?
- What support staff work in the school, and how is this support arranged?
- If the school has a support base, how much time do pupils spend in mainstream classes?
- How do school staff work with other professionals (e.g. health, social work, or voluntary sector staff)?
- How would your child's needs be communicated to all staff working with them?
- What arrangements would be in place for keeping you up to date with how your child is getting on at school?

## Placing requests

A placing request is a formal, recordable, request you can make to a local authority for a place for your child in a school that is neither their catchment school, nor the school recommended by the local authority.

Sometimes schools or other professionals ask the local authority on the parents' behalf to consider placing a pupil in a school that is not their catchment school. This is not the same as making a placing request, so you may not have the same right of appeal if you disagree with the local authority's decision on where to place your child.

Most placing requests are made for pupils starting primary school or high school. But you can make a placing request at any time during your child's school education, including to a nursery. See below for more information on different types of placing requests.

Young people aged 16 or over can also make their own placing requests. This includes a request to go back into a local authority school after they have left the school roll. However, the local authority would not have to accept this request, as they do not have a duty to provide school education to a young person who has left school. If your child is unable to understand how to make a placing request themselves, you can do it on their behalf.

## Which types of schools can I make a placing request to?

You can make placing request for your child to attend:

- a school in Scotland that is run by a local authority (including special schools)
- an independent or grant-aided special school in Scotland
- a school in England, Wales, Northern Ireland or outwith the UK that provides support wholly or mainly for pupils with additional support needs.

Support bases or units which are attached to mainstream schools come under the legal definition of a special school, if they cater wholly or mainly for pupils with additional support needs. This means that you can make a placing request for a place at a support base or unit for your child.

Before making a placing request to an independent or grant-aided special school, or a school outwith Scotland, you must check that the school managers are willing to admit your child. You cannot make a placing request to an independent or grant-aided school that is not a special school.

## Transport

It is important to know that if you make a successful placing request to a school run by a local authority, the local authority will not have a duty to provide transport for your child to attend the school, even if it is further away than walking distance.

However, if the school you have applied for is the only one that can meet your child's needs, your local authority should consider whether refusing to provide transport would lead to them not providing your child with the support they need to get the best from their school education.

If the school is a grant-aided or independent special school, the local authority must pay all the costs of the placement, including transport if this is needed.

You should always discuss transport with your local authority before making a placing request.

## How do I make a placing request?

If your chosen school (called the 'specified school') is run by a local authority, you must make your placing request to the authority responsible running for that school. This might be a different local authority from the one where your child lives. For example, if you live in East Renfrewshire but would like your child to attend a school in Glasgow, you must make your placing request to Glasgow City Council.

If your chosen school is an independent or grant-aided special school, and they have said they can offer your child a place, your placing request should be made to the local authority where your child normally lives (their 'home authority').

Placing requests must be made in writing, or in another form that can be kept for future reference, such as an audio or video recording. You can usually find placing request forms on the local authority's website. Schools can often provide paper forms, or you can contact the local authority to find out if it has placing request application forms that you should use, and where you can find them.

Your request should include the following information:

- your name and address
- your child's name and age
- the name of their current school, if any
- the name of the school you have chosen
- the reasons for your choice of school.

It is important to include all relevant information to support your request.

If you include more than one school in your placing request, you must make it clear which one is your first choice. This will be the 'specified school' and used for the placing request.

## When can I make a placing request, and how long will the decision take?

If you want your child to start at the school at the beginning of the next school year in August, and you apply by 15 March that year, you should get a decision by 30 April.

Different local authorities may set their own deadlines for placing requests. In some cases, this can be before the Christmas break, so you should find out as soon as possible what the deadline is for local authority you want to make a request to. This information is often available on the local authority website, or you can contact the local authority to ask them about this.

If you want your child to move to a different school in the middle of a school year, or if you make your request after 15 March, the local authority has two months to decide whether to accept your request (though you may get an answer sooner).

You should keep a note of the date you submitted your placing request. If you have not had a decision after two months (or by 30 April if your request went in before 15 March as above), the request is treated as being refused (sometimes called a 'deemed refusal').

## What will the response include?

Within five working days of receiving a placing request, the local authority must write to you to tell you either that they are accepting the placing request, or:

- who will be considering your placing request
- whether you will have an opportunity, either in person or in writing, to present your case in support of your request
- contact details for the person you can contact for further information about the procedure
- the reasons why your request could be refused
- your right to appeal if it is refused
- the date by which your request would be treated as having been refused.

Once they have made their decision, the local authority must write to you to tell you whether they have accepted your request for a place at your chosen school. If they refuse your request, they must give you the reasons why and explain your right to appeal the decision.

## Reasons your placing request can be refused

Local authorities must accept placing requests, unless certain reasons apply. Your request may be refused if:

- it would mean the local authority failing in its duty to provide mainstream education (i.e., they do not feel that one of the exceptions to the 'presumption of mainstream' applies)
- your request is for an independent or grant-aided special school, and the local authority has offered your child a place at one of its own schools that is willing and able to support your child
- it would mean an additional teacher has to be employed, now or in the future

- it would mean an additional class has to be created
- it would be seriously detrimental to the continuity of your child's education
- it is likely to be seriously detrimental to the educational wellbeing of other pupils in the school, or to discipline in the school
- the education at the school is not considered suitable for the age, ability or aptitude of your child
- the school is a single-sex school, and your child is not of the sex admitted there
- accepting your request would prevent the local authority reserving a place for a child moving into the school's catchment area
- your child does not have the additional support needs that the school caters for
- the local authority has already required your child to stop attending the school
- it would result in a significant cost to extend or change the accommodation or facilities of the school.

If one or more of these circumstances (apart from the first two) apply, the local authority can still place your child in the school, but they do not have to.

## My placing request was refused. What can I do?

If your placing request was refused, you have a few different options, including appealing the decision.

### Accept the decision

One option is to accept the local authority's decision and for your child to attend the school that the local authority has proposed. You can focus on working with the school to make sure your child will have the support your child they need to attend that school. It is important to remember that the local authority must keep your child's support under review. This means that if any issues arise, there will still be ways for you to raise your concerns. You can request changes to your child's support or school placement at any time if you feel the support the school is providing is not adequate.

You can also request mediation with the local authority to try and reach an agreement about the best way forward for your child. Find out more in our factsheet on [Mediation](#).

## Appeal the decision

When the local authority tells you it has refused your placing request, it must tell you how you can appeal the decision. You can only appeal one placing request in any 12-month period.

### If you requested a place for your child at a mainstream school

You should send your appeal to the local authority's education appeal committee. You must submit your appeal in writing within 28 days of receiving the refusal letter, or, if the local authority did not respond to your placing request by the deadline (see '**When can I make a placing request, and how long will the decision take?**' on page 9), within 28 days of the missed deadline.

The exceptions to this are if:

- your child has a co-ordinated support plan (CSP)
- your local authority has agreed that your child needs a CSP, but one has not yet been prepared
- the local authority has informed you that it is going to assess whether your child needs a CSP
- the local authority has decided that your child does not need a CSP, and you are appealing this decision.

If one of these situations applies, your appeal should go to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal. You must submit your appeal to the tribunal within two months of receiving the refusal letter, or, if the local authority did not respond to your placing request by the deadline (see '**When can I make a placing request, and how long will the decision take?**' on page 9), within two months of the missed deadline.

### If you applied for your child to have a place at any type of special school, including a support base or unit

Your appeal should go to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal. You must submit your appeal within two months of receiving the refusal letter, or, if the local authority did not respond to your placing request by the deadline (see '**When can I make a placing request, and how long will the decision take?**' on page 9), within two months of the missed deadline.

Find out more about these appeal routes in our factsheets on [Education appeal committees](#) and [The Additional Support Needs Tribunal](#).

## I'm considering moving my child to a different school. What should I do?

If you are concerned that your child's school is not meeting their needs, and are considering moving them somewhere else, it is worth considering whether there are steps that you could take to resolve any issues first. Whilst moving a pupil to a different school part way through their time at primary or secondary school can sometimes result in positive change for them, there are also risks. It is important to weigh up the options carefully and give your child's school the opportunity to try and address your concerns and improve things for your child.

Start by raising your concerns with the person responsible for additional support for learning at the school. If are not satisfied with their response, you can write to the head teacher. After that, if you still have concerns, you can contact the person responsible for additional support for learning at the local authority. There are also more formal steps you can take to try and resolve issues. Find out more about what you can do if you are worried about your child's support in our factsheets on [Working together with your child's school](#) and [Avoiding and solving problems](#).

If you continue to feel that the current school is not right for your child, the next step is to speak to the professionals that work with your child about other options. They can advise you on other schools you could consider, and how you can go about asking the local authority to place your child in a school that can meet your child's needs.

The local authority has a duty to provide your child with an education, and with the support they need to fully benefit from it. Therefore, if your child's school is not able to provide the support they need, the local authority must consider alternatives.

It is usually best to try and agree an alternative school with the local authority, before considering making a placing request. Although you have the right to make a placing request at any time, working with the local authority can mean that arrangements can be made more quickly and can avoid any potential issues with transport.

## Where can I find out more?

**Presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting: guidance (2019)**  
[www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting](http://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting)

This is the Scottish Government's guidance for those making decisions about school placements for pupils with additional support needs.

**Choosing a school: a guide for parents (2016)** [www.gov.scot/publications/choosing-school-guide-parents-nov-16](http://www.gov.scot/publications/choosing-school-guide-parents-nov-16)

The Scottish Government's guide for parents on choosing a school, and the placing request system. It includes information about how catchments for denominational schools work, and more information about appealing to Education Appeal Committees.

**Education Scotland's Find an Inspection Report tool** <https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/find-an-inspection-report>

A search tool where you can find listings for all schools in Scotland, including independent and grant-aided schools.



# How Enquire can help

Enquire can help you understand your child's rights to additional support for learning and how to work in partnership with their school or nursery to make sure your child gets the support they need.

Enquire can:

- explain your child's rights to additional support for learning
- listen to any questions and concerns
- advise you on the way forward
- help you find local education and support services.

You can contact our helpline on **0345 123 2303** or **info@enquire.org.uk**  
Access to interpreters is available.

You can also find lots more information about additional support for learning, including our full range of publications, at **www.enquire.org.uk**

The information on our website is available in over 100 languages and with a range of accessibility tools, such as text-to-speech.

Reach, as part of Enquire, provides advice and information for children, parents, carers and professionals about children's rights to additional support for learning: **www.reach.scot**

Enquire is also a partner in the My Rights, My Say service. My Rights, My Say supports children aged 12-15 with additional support needs to exercise their rights to be involved in decisions about their support in school:  
**www.myrightsmysay.scot**

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

