Choosing a school for someone with SEND

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The special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) service, works with children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs that makes it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age. These children need extra help and support in education to enable them to maximize their learning potential.

The term special educational needs encompasses a wide range of learning needs. The code of practice lists the following four areas. Children may need extra help and support within one or more of these areas:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- Sensory and/or physical needs

Understand your child's needs and requirements

If your child has special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), it is important you understand your child's specific needs and requirements before choosing a school as there will be more for you to consider. If your child has an Education, Health and Care plan this document will have identified their needs and requirements.

However, if your child isn't receiving support already, you need to get in touch with Blackpool Council, SEND for advice on how to approach the task of getting more support for your child.

Research schools in your area

Once you understand your child's needs, you may want to research schools in your area to make sure they can meet those needs.

Things to consider:

- The distance from home to the school as this will have practical and financial implications. Not all children with SEN will be eligible for free travel to school, even if they have a an education, health and care plan
- The school's individual website - you will find useful information like the school's prospectus, special educational needs policy, and behaviour or discipline policy

Arrange a visit

We recommend you visit the schools you are considering to find out more about how they can meet your child's needs.

It is best to arrange an appointment to ensure there is time to talk, it may be best to arrange the visit while children are in the class so you can see the school in action.

To arrange a visit, contact the school and arrange an appointment to meet with the headteacher or special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). Don't forget you can always take someone along with you.

Think what is important for you and your child and prepare your questions in advance. You may also have a list of points that you want clarifying after doing your research the school's website and/or prospectus.

During the visit write down the name of the school, headteacher and SENCO and the answers to any questions you have asked. This will

make it easier to compare schools after you have finished making all your visits.

Some questions you might ask

- How many children attend the school? How big are the classes? What additional support is available in the classrooms?
- How are classes organised? Open Plan? Individual classrooms? Mixed age classes?
- How are children grouped within the year? Are they in ability or mixed ability groups? What is the balance between whole class/small group/individual teaching approaches?
- How are the children introduced into school? By visits in the summer term prior to the September start? Gradually during September? How flexible are these arrangements?
- Are staff from the school able to visit your child in their existing provision /placement?
- Can these staff liaise with people already involved with your child?
- How does the school propose to meet the special educational needs and/or disabilities of your child?
- Are there any other children in the school with similar difficulties to those of your own child?
- Are there any staff in the school with a particular expertise/interest in the areas where your child has difficulties? Have they experience of teaching children with difficulties similar to those of your child?
- How are those children with special educational needs supported? Are they helped within the classroom or withdrawn for individual help? What is the balance between these two?
- How does the school devise its Individual Educational Plans (IEP) for pupils with difficulties? How would your child's progress be reviewed/monitored, how would you be involved in this?
- How would your child's progress be reviewed within school? How would the school involve you in helping your child in addition to being part of the review process?
- What sort of facilities and resources does the school appear to offer in terms of e.g. space, equipment, materials, computers etc.?
- Does the school seem interested in your child? How would they plan for their possible arrival and meeting their needs once there?
- Can you talk to parents whose children already attend the school e.g. via the parent-teachers association, or speak with a member of the governing body/SEN governor?
- What additional support is available?
- Is teaching by whole class, small group, individual teaching or a mixture?

The school offer

Every school is required to meet the learning needs of every child in their school, including those learners identified as having a special educational need (SEN) or those who are disabled (D).

Mainstream schools must:

- Use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEND gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet and support children and young people with SEND
- Ensure that children and young people with SEND engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEND
- Designate a teacher to be responsible for co-ordinating SEND provision (the SEN co-ordinator, or SENCo)
- Inform parents when they are making special educational provision for a child
- Prepare a report on the implementation of their SEND policy and their arrangements for the admission of disabled children, the steps being taken to prevent disabled children from being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to enable access to the school for disabled children and their accessibility plan showing how they plan to improve access progressively over time

School offer: Every school is expected to publish on its website special educational need information called the school offer: The school offer is individual to every school, but each school must clearly state how they will support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. All special schools also have to publish the school offer on their school website.

Home education

The parents' right to educate their child at home applies equally where a child has special educational needs (SEN). This right is irrespective of whether the child has an education, health and care plan or not.

Therefore, should a parent of a child with an education, health and care plan wish to home educate their child, this is possible and they will take full responsibility for the education, including all expenses for additional tuition and exams. Before the child's name is removed from the school's register, the Local Authority would ask that a meeting with the child's parent takes place to discuss their plans. It would be hoped that the meeting would be with the SEND Officer, the elective home education officer, the parent and the child. Should the home education be suitable, then the local authority has no duty to arrange any special educational provision, however, the local authority can consider how it can support parents to arrange suitable SEN provision for the child and the local authority will continue to review the education health and care plan on an annual basis.

A child or young person can return at any point to education should this be requested by parent or by the young person him or herself. Parents should also be aware that should the provision be deemed at any time to be “unsuitable”, discussion will take place with a SEND officer, member of the elective home education team, parent and child to discuss ways forward to ensure the education becomes suitable. Should an “unsuitable provision” continue, the local authority will work with the pupil welfare service towards implementing a school attendance Order to ensure that the child’s education does not suffer further.

Further help

Blackpool Council SEND team

Blackpool Council
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
P O Box 4, Blackpool, FY1 1NA

Email: send@blackpool.gov.uk
Tel: 01253 476602 or 01253 476553

Blackpool Parent Forum

You might also want to talk to other parents and the Blackpool Parent Forum can provide support.

Blackpool SEND information, advice and support service

Independent advice and support is also available.

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