

An A – Z of points to consider if your child has physical difficulties

If your child has physical difficulties, you may wish to consider some of these things when choosing a secondary school. The list may provide you with the sort of questions to ask on an open evening, but you may also find it useful to visit the school on a normal school day, by arrangement, so that you can get the feel of what it is like when all the pupils are in school. It will certainly seem very different after being in a primary school!

A ACCESSIBILITY

All schools should be accessible to all pupils, but you may want to look at stairs, ramps, lifts, hand rails, doorways or uneven surfaces. Schools should have Access Plans to improve accessibility. So even if a building does not look very easy to get around at present, there may be plans to improve access. Is there a subject area which is totally inaccessible to any pupil in a wheelchair and if so, could a downstairs room be allocated to that subject? Ask!

B BUDDY SYSTEMS

Some schools have buddy systems, in which peers or older pupils are asked to help pupils who are more vulnerable. Does the school use this system?

C CHANGING ROOMS

If your child needs more room for changing for P.E., somewhere to sit or room for someone to help, is there enough space?

D DINING AREAS

Dining rooms sometimes have tables with integral stools, which may not suit your child. Can an alternative be provided? Are lunchtime supervisors available to help carry trays or are peers used to help with this?

E EXERCISES

If your child has to have physio during the day, is there a room which can be used? Nobody wants to do exercises in a cupboard or a corridor!

F FURNITURE

Is the furniture going to be suitable for your child? If not, don't worry too much, as schools ought to provide some non-specialist furniture, for example a science stool with a back and arms, if it is necessary. If your child already has specialist furniture, are classrooms big enough to accommodate it? Their specialist items will be transferred to the secondary school if they are still appropriate for your child.

G GAMES

Although all children should be included in all P.E. lessons, some games and sports are more difficult to access and your child may not cope well with being outside in winter. Some schools have multigym facilities where pupils can work out at their own performance level instead of feeling sorry to miss out on the rugby game or freezing on the football pitch.

- H HYGIENE ROOMS** Is there one in the school or is there only a medical room? Schools may have something written in their access plan, but you will want to ask about this.
- I I.T. EQUIPMENT AND ACCESS**
Are there plenty of computers available for pupils who have difficulty with written recording? Are smaller, portable word-processors used by some pupils?
- J JOGGING BOTTOMS AND SPECIAL CLOTHES**
Are P.E. staff happy to let pupils wear non-standard P.E. kit if needed?
- K KIT FOR P.E.**
Can P.E. kit be kept in school to cut down on the amount of baggage going to and from home? (Though it might be nice if it goes home to be washed more than once a term!)
- L LAPTOPS**
If your child has been provided with their own dedicated laptop or word-processor, where will it be stored during the lessons when it is not needed?
- M MOVING AROUND THE SCHOOL**
Is the school made up of lots of different blocks linked by paths open to the elements? Will this be a problem for children who are less mobile and vulnerable to the cold?
- N NERVOUS PUPILS?**
It is good for very anxious children to have a single named adult to whom they can turn for help, as well as the different support staff who help in lessons. Does the school operate a key worker support system?
- O OUT OR IN?**
Do pupils have to go out at breaks and lunchtimes or can they stay indoors?
- P PRINTING WORK**
If your child has a laptop or word-processor for their exclusive use, what would they have to do to print off work?
- Q QUIET AREAS**
Some pupils prefer to have areas where they can go to escape the hustle and bustle at breaks and lunchtimes. Are there designated areas which are always kept quieter?
- R RECORDING WORK**
If your child has difficulties with written recording, what systems are in place in the school to help them?
- S STORAGE**
Are there lockers for pupils to store books when they are not needed? If not, can pupils who have difficulty carrying things leave textbooks and heavy items somewhere so that they do not have to carry round all their books for the whole day?

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T TOILETS

Sorry, but these are very important! Are there enough disabled toilets around the site and are they big enough for wheelchairs, hoists and helpers? Are they used as a spare cupboard for cleaning fluids, floor polishers and sundry items?

U UNIFORM

If a blazer and tie are going to be uncomfortable and difficult to manage, what alternatives could be found?

V VISITS

Does the school have a fixed range of visits? All pupils are entitled to go on them, so you may want to ask what arrangements have been made in the past to accommodate all pupils, whatever their abilities or disabilities.

W WORKING TOGETHER

Liaison between parents and school is essential. What communication channels do the school use to ensure close liaison can be maintained, not just termly but every day if needed?

X XTRA HELP

It is important that pupils do not become dependent on one adult to support them in school, so some schools have different support staff for different subjects. Others have more consistent support. You may want to ask what arrangements the school normally uses.

Y YOU MAY STILL HAVE OTHER THINGS WE HAVEN'T THOUGHT OF!

Don't be afraid to ask...

Z We give up!



Produced by the Specialist Teachers for Pupils with Physical Disabilities / ICT (SEN) / AAC

If you would like help, please contact:

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