

What to ask and look out for when visiting schools if your child has an autistic spectrum disorder



What to look out for:

- A welcoming, inclusive attitude
- There are many factors that *may* affect your child, for example how constricted the corridors are and whether faculties have some quiet spaces that a student could withdraw to if needed. However, school buildings cannot be changed to suit your child and you need to look most for the open, welcoming school who may be willing to look for solutions to individual problems.



Questions you may wish to ask (and the answers you are hoping for):

- ***Have they had whole school training in ASDs within the last few years?*** (You would hope that there has been some initial induction into what autism is and the dissemination of some useful strategies).
- ***How does the SENCO ensure that teaching staff know about the particular needs / autistic differences of your child?*** (SENCOs give information in different ways. Brief bullet points to show possible problems and good ways of teaching/ managing the child are best as no-one is going to remember screeds of information. Some schools develop small “passport” cards with / for some students).
- ***Do they have a “sanctuary” of any kind where students can go at break and lunchtime if they need to find somewhere quieter? Is any adult supervision of this place set up? Are there any activities available in this place and if so what?*** (You will know whether or not your child will benefit from a quieter place/ somewhere definite to go/ something definite to do when he gets there / someone to facilitate social contact etc. Schools vary in what they provide).
- ***How will the school aim to keep in touch regarding progress given the child’s additional needs?*** (Not many secondary schools keep home-school books but some schools run a system of weekly emails or phone calls. Others will let you know if there is a problem and will send home IEPs when they are reviewed. You should be asked in to school for annual reviews).
- ***Will you be given the name of a key worker who you can contact when necessary?*** (It’s helpful to have the one main person you try to liaise with so that you know who to contact to give or receive information/ ask for help in sorting out a difficulty).
- ***Do they have any ways of helping students who find their homework difficult in one way or another?*** (There may be a homework club; they might email some of the homework home; they may have study sessions to help some pupils).
- ***How do you try to ensure that the children develop their friendships and social skills in addition to their academic skills?*** (You would be hoping for good PHSE

work especially in the first few weeks of term. Some schools are using the secondary SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning). Some schools have buddy systems. Some have social skills programmes that run from time to time. Many have interest clubs that could engage your child with others who are like-minded).

- **Do you plan any extra induction to the school for children who need a thorough transition programme?** (Some schools allow this to happen if primary schools take the initiative; some run their own extra day or even a whole week's summer school for students with a statement or at SA+. Some SENCOs visit the primary school to attend a review or visit the child in their primary setting. Sometimes a secondary school Teaching Assistant is able to visit the child in their primary school to liaise with primary staff, see what arrangements are set up and talk through helpful systems used by the primary school.)



A word of warning

Think twice before you involve your child in visiting lots of schools and making decisions. Children on the spectrum tend to find change and uncertainty difficult. It could be best not to involve your child in as much discussion and evaluation of different possibilities as is usually shared between parents and children. Be careful not to communicate any worries you may have over that transfer to secondary.

**Be
Positive!**

Try to take a positive and problem-solving approach about the change of school ahead! It may surprise you by being better than you feared and no good purpose can be served by building up worries. You are bound to feel nervous but try to mask these feelings with optimism when talking about the change with your child.

If you would like help, please contact:

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