

Education

Secondary school

Looking at secondary schools; some questions to ask

Mainstream schools

Inclusion

- What is the anti-bullying policy like?
- Do they promote positive images of children who are different?
- Does the school genuinely care about pupils of all abilities?

Environment

- How is the space arranged?
- How many children are in the school?
- How easy is it to find your way around the site? Is it safe and secure?
- How far away is the school? How would your child get there?

Social and communication

- Will there be familiar faces from primary school?
- How does the school support friendships and social interaction?
- What happens at break and lunchtimes? Are there any lunchtime clubs?
- Would the new school work with primary school to settle the child in?
- Communication with parents – how is this done?

Teaching and learning

- How do they keep records – what kind of assessment do they use? How is this differentiated?
- Are children taught in mixed ability groups or in sets? If in sets, how are these organised?
- How do the subject teachers differentiate the curriculum?
- How do they use TAs? Are they subject based or allocated per child?
- Is there a separate learning support base or a nurture class? If so, do children with SEND spend their time in mainstream classes or will some of their lessons be elsewhere?
- Is there an alternative curriculum at KS4?
- How will homework be differentiated?
- Is homework available on the school's website?
- Do they have any experience of educating children who have Down's syndrome? Are they willing to undertake training?

Special schools

- What is the specialism of the school? Is it set up for particular types of SEND?
- Find out about your child's likely peer group. This is important in terms of social interaction.
- Is the curriculum at the right level? Can young people gain qualifications?
- Does the school support alternative communication methods?
- Are there opportunities for practical and vocational learning?
- Are there good role models for behaviour?
- Are therapies and medical support available at the school?
- Sensory needs (hearing and vision) – is the environment suitable? Are there specialist teachers at the school?
- Transport – is this provided for all children?

Starting secondary school

You will need to start looking well in advance and consider a number of different options. You are likely to be looking over a wider geographical area than for primary school. Your local authority must publish details of schools as part of their local offer. Individual schools must also publish information about the provision they make for young people with SEND.

Make sure your child's Education Health and Care Plan is up to date and reflects your child's current needs and the secondary school environment.

Most secondary schools will have taster days for year 6 pupils. Your child may need more visits to help them become familiar with the new environment. It can help to get pictures of the school, a plan of the layout and if possible, your child's timetable in advance.

In secondary school, your child will come across a much larger number of staff who won't all know them well. You may want to think about preparing a one-page profile that is easy to share with more people. You may also want to ask if the school has any kind of buddy system for new pupils.

Extra help in school

Everyone teaching your child should be informed about what helps your child to learn, feel comfortable and welcomed. We hold regular online training sessions about secondary education.

Your child's support in school will be overseen by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) or Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo). In primary school your child will probably have been supported by one or two teaching assistants (TAs). In mainstream secondary school they are likely to have several TAs who may be organised by subject area. In some schools there may be a specific learning support base where pupils can receive targeted teaching in small groups.

In secondary school children who have Down's syndrome should be aiming to develop more independence, for instance moving between lessons on their own.

Individual subject teachers must be involved in planning their learning and in teaching them within the class.

If your child attends a special school, the environment is likely to be smaller and less of a change from primary school. However, there may still be different subject teachers for some lessons. Special schools cater for children with a wide variety of needs and their experience of

learners who have Down's syndrome may vary, so it's still important for the school to have Down's syndrome specific information.

Working with the school

Typically parents have less contact with their child's school once the child has moved to secondary school. Pupils will probably have a school planner or homework diary. Your child may need help from a TA to record homework or other messages. You could also check whether homework can be sent by email or is available on the school's website.

Try to establish before your child starts who will be the main contact with the school, for example the SENCo/ALNCo, the form tutor or a lead TA.

There will be a formal review of your child's EHCP once a year and more frequent target setting throughout the year.

Curriculum and assessment

The school has a duty to adapt the curriculum as necessary for your child. This could mean using more hands-on visual teaching or providing differentiated (adapted) work within the same topic.

All young people should have access to some form of accreditation such as pre entry and entry level certificates or the ASDAN programmes for students with learning disabilities at Key stage 4. It's important to check early on with the school what courses they provide for students, in addition to GCSEs.

Preparing for adulthood and leaving school

In year 9 all pupils with an EHCP must have a review specifically looking at preparing for adulthood. This is often known as transition planning. See the section on our website on transition and independence.

At this point you and your son or daughter should be looking, amongst other things, at the options for post 16 education. See our Further education factsheet for more information.

Further help and information

The Information Team at the DSA is happy to answer your education related queries.

Please call the helpline on 0333 1212 300 or email info@downs-syndrome.org.uk

We also offer several online training events that may be of interest. Visit our website for all the details or email training@downs-syndrome.org.uk

Find your local information, advice and support service for special educational needs and disability on the [Information, Advice and Support Services Network \(IASS\) network website](#). This was previously called Parent Partnership.

Contact us

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