

SEN and Disability
Information, Advice
and Support

Solihull
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Choosing a School

This leaflet is intended to provide guidance to parents living in Solihull, who are applying for a school place for their child with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

September 2018

Parents know their children better than anyone and therefore usually have an idea of what environment will suit their child.

When considering schools you will find it helpful to find out as much as you can about each school. You need to know that your preferences are based on a sound understanding of what each school can offer your child or children. We hope the suggestions outlined in this leaflet will help you through this important process in your children's education.

Making a School Choice

No-one will tell you explicitly which school you should express a preference for, a good starting point is to talk to staff at your child's pre-school or Nursery about the 'type' of provision they think they need. If other professionals are involved, speak with them too they will have a good idea of your child's needs; be mindful that no-one can or will tell you which school you should express a preference for.

If your child has an EHC Plan, it will usually indicate the type of provision required to meet your child's needs. Have this in mind when you're looking at schools and preparing your questions.

If your child has an EHC Plan, you will receive a letter from the LA which will tell you the date they need your decision by. You ask for any of the following:-

- maintained school and any form of academy or free school (mainstream or special)
- non-maintained special school
- independent school approved for this purpose by the Secretary of State and published in a list available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-special-schools-and-colleges

The Local Authority (LA) have to agree your choice of school, **unless**

- the school is unsuitable for your child;
- it would prevent the efficient education of other children in the school (for example the school is oversubscribed) or
- it would not be good use of LA resources.

If you express a preference for a suitable school that is not your nearest school then Solihull may expect you to ensure your child can get there.

If your child does not have an EHC Plan, even if they have SEND, then the LA's standard school admissions criteria will apply.

<http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Schools-learning/schooladmissions>

Unfortunately, as many schools in Solihull are oversubscribed, strict admissions criteria will apply. Using the link <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Schools-learning/schooladmissions/consultation-on-admission-arrangements-2018-19> you can consult the admissions/oversubscription criteria for any Solihull school that you are interested in; this will enable you to work out the 'priority level' your application would be given, so you can see how realistic your application would be.

Important: For a child whose **exceptional social or medical reasons** can only be met by a particular school, their application *may* be elevated to 'Priority 1b' level.

Applications made on these grounds **must** be supported by independent professional evidence. The Council's 'Advisory Group for Admissions' will consider applications and evidence and make recommendations to Cabinet Portfolio Holder, who will grant priority 1b to applications deemed to have exceptional social or medical reasons.

Helping you decide

Before you visit:

- Think about what's important to your child & what type of school they need.
- Read through any recent reports, IEP's and your child's EHC Plan.
- Consider taking spare copies of your child's EHC Plan and other useful information/reports to discuss and pass onto the school SENCO.
- Look at Solihull's Local Offer for information on local schools and information about the way individual schools support their pupils' additional needs <http://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer/education/school-local-offers>
- Look at the schools website/read their prospectus and their SEN Policy.
- Get a copy of the school's latest Ofsted summary report available from www.ofsted.gov.uk or the local Library.
- Prepare any notes and particular questions you have, you may find it helpful to write any questions down and take them with you.

When you visit:

Use your eyes and ears as you walk round. Does the school feel welcoming? Do the children seem cheerful, busy and interested? And do the staff? Think about how noisy, crowded, orderly or lively it seems and what this would mean for your child. Are you encouraged to see the whole school? Check the classrooms and think about how they are organised. Is the school well supplied with resources and equipment? Look at the notice boards. Is work by children of all abilities on display? Make sure you get a look at the playground during a break time. Try to observe how staff speak to the children. What is the Head teacher like? He or she is crucial to how the school runs and how happy and supported both pupils and staff feel. Look out for the things that matter to you and your child whether that's lots of computers, great football coaching or an emphasis on giving pupils real responsibility.

Ask questions. You want to find out practical details, like class sizes and arrangements for extra support. But even more important is the school's attitude to children with special needs. Do they look for problems or solutions? Do they see meeting special needs as a chore or as a benefit to the whole school?

Some things you might want to ask are:

- What is the staff's experience and understanding of my child's needs?
- Has the school had a child before with my child's needs?
- Do any of the staff have specialist training?
- What strategies and resources would be used to help my child?
- Where would the school turn to for specialist advice and support?
- How do they deal with difficult behaviour?
- How would they support my child outside lesson time?
- How do they help children mix and make friends?
- How do they deal with bullying?
- How would they meet my child's medical or personal care needs?
- How do they consult and communicate with parents?
- What out of school activities are there and can all children take part?

If it is a special school or unit you might also ask:

- What range of disability does the school cater for?
- What therapies are available?
- What subjects will my child be able to study?
- Would they get some qualifications?
- Will they get help with personal and life skills?
- What inclusion experiences does the school offer?
- Is there an appropriate group of children for my child to learn with and find friends?

How will your child travel to school?

Your child may be eligible for travel assistance on the grounds of their SEN. Families may also qualify on grounds such as low income, distance to school and safety of travel route. Consult Solihull LEA's '**Home to School Travel Assistance Policy for Pupils from Reception to Year 11**' for full details of eligibility. This can be viewed at <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/schooltransport>

Your rights

- Your child has the right to a school place whilst they are between the 5 & 16.
- You have the right to express a preference of schools you would like your child to go to, whether the school is inside or outside the area you live in.
- If you are not offered a place for your child at the schools you have expressed a preference for, you have the right to appeal to an independent panel.



Take it one step at a time, the decision will be a process you'll work through, **Solihull SENDIAS** can offer you impartial advice & guidance, to support you in expressing your preference and working through the admissions process.

Who to contact

Solihull SENDIAS

Phone: **0121 516 5173**

E-mail: solihullsendias@family-action.org.uk

Web: www.family-action.org.uk/solihullsendias

Facebook: [Family Action/Solihull SENDIAS](https://www.facebook.com/FamilyAction/SolihullSENDIAS)

Solihull MBC: -

Web: www.solihull.gov.uk

Local Offer: <http://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer>

Solihull StART – SEN Inclusion and Access Service

Phone: 0121 704 6690

E-mail: edsen@solihull.gov.uk

School Admissions

Phone: 0121 704 6693

Email: admissions@solihull.gov.uk

School Transport (Solihull Travel Assistance)

Phone: 0121 704 6610

Email: schooltransport@solihull.gov.uk

IPSEA (For legal Information and advice on applying and appealing)

Phone: 0800 018 4016

Web: www.ipsea.org.uk

Good Schools Guide: www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk

UK Schools Search: www.ukschoolsearch.net

Edubase directory: www.education.gov.uk/edubase up to 15th September

Get Information about Schools: www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk