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Our work wouldn't be possible without the generosity of our supporters. Your donation can help us continue to provide invaluable autism services, and build an inclusive society where autistic people can reach their full potential.

To make a donation, please visit www.autismni.org or call us on **028 9040 1729**.

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Tips and hints on school selection



Transitioning to a new school can be an anxious time for many families however, parents with an autistic child can experience additional worries and challenges.

Many parents of autistic children can face difficult decisions when it comes to their child's education including, the different types of school, their child's rights, and finding a school that will understand their child's needs.

Transitioning from nursery to primary school, primary to secondary school or transitioning through a placement breakdown can cause additional stress to an autistic child or young person.

For some children, the transition from primary to secondary school can be better as secondary school is often more clearly structured with colour coded timetables and corresponding subject books. This can make it easier for a child to be more independent and manage their day a bit better.

Hints and tips to help you with decision making

Trying to find a school that will understand your child's needs and that will work in partnership with you may be challenging, but you can contact the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS) to find out what your local schools provide for autistic children.

Remember your child is unique, and they will not have identical needs, reactions, and behaviours as other autistic children, but talking to other parents about their experiences can help you in your decision making when thinking about school selection.

1. On your visit to the school, it is good to try and arrange a time to meet the principal, the SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) and the teacher/s who will be teaching your child.
2. Bring a copy of your child's Statement of Special Educational Needs, if they have one. This can be shared with key staff to discuss how the Statement will be implemented.
3. Have a good look at the classroom environment, considering any sensory challenges your child may have and how they may cope with the various colours, smells, space and numbers.

4. Discuss your child's specific behaviours and reactions, and how the school will respond and how they will provide help to support your child transition.
5. If possible, take pictures of the schools, grounds, teaching staff, reception staff and toilets to help them prepare.
6. Discuss what previous experience the school has in supporting autistic children, how did they manage this, and do they offer pre-attendance visits for the child when the school is quiet.
7. Discuss what training the staff have in autism including interventions and strategies such as PECS, Teacch and Super Symbols.
8. Consider the schools structures and schedules, ask if they offer a 'chill out' or 'quiet space' and what happens during free time – is this planned for or what support is there for your child to cope with this.
9. Consider how secure the school is, and if your child could easily get out if they became distressed or overwhelmed.
10. Discuss the schools policy and procedures in relation to bullying and in general what level of parental involvement they welcome.

Remember

For autistic children, the impact of an inadequate school environment can affect their self-esteem and mental health, as well as limiting their access to education and their ability to reach their full potential.

As a parent you may worry about the stress these transitions may have on your child, but it is important to remember that with the right supports and preparation, your child can reach their full potential. Parents can always contact the school principal, SENCo or pastoral care team for advice.

Useful Websites

www.autismni.org
www.education-ni.gov.uk
www.eani.org.uk/parents
www.childrenslawcentre.org
www.senac.co.uk
www.niccy.org/parents-and-carers/how-we-can-help-you/