



# Choosing a school

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How do you...

# Choose a school?

**“Research shows that some adoptive placements falter because of educational issues.”**

*Commission for Social Care Inspection of Catholic Children's Society  
(Diocese of Nottingham) November 2005*

It is clear that choosing and working with a school is very important in an adoptive situation. Remember you are the advocate for the child!

## Things you might want to find out about a school:

- ◆ What experience has the school had in dealing with children from the care system? For example, does the school understand that such children may have learning difficulties or delay caused by multiple placements or that the children may need additional support as they adjust to living in their new family?
- ◆ Does it have an understanding of the problems of children from the care system or those placed for adoption may present?
- ◆ Pastoral care system - what supervision takes place at lunchtime? Do the school provide activities? Are the supervisors trained to deal with disruptive behaviour?
- ◆ Does it have clear policies regarding Special Educational Needs (SEN), behaviour (are systems for behaviour support in place?), bullying, inclusion, homework, Personal Social Health Education (PSHE)?

## EdPsych

Educational Psychologist. The EdPsych works closely with families and schools to ascertain causes of difficulties being experienced by children whether these be learning, behavioural, emotional, etc. The EdPsych helps to develop programmes to help overcome individual difficulties.

## Community Schools

The Local Authority is the employer and admitting authority. If a family wanted to appeal against a decision, they would appeal to the local authority.

## Foundation Schools

Has its own admissions policies and the Governors are totally responsible as the employers and admitting authorities. Any appeals are heard by the Governors.

## Faith Schools

Work in a similar way as Foundation Schools.

## Pastoral Care

Looking after children's general welfare in school.

**IEP** **Individual Education Plan** - Setting manageable targets for the child, bringing the teacher, child and family on board. This is applicable to the child in that particular school but is usually passed on to the child's new school as part of good practice. The review process normally takes place each term, it involves the school, outside agencies who may be involved with the child and the parents. The contribution from the parents is important.

**PEP** **Personal Education Plan** - all children in local authority care should have a PEP. This is jointly put together by Social Services, Health and Education who all give their view of the child. This plan follows the child to whatever school they may attend. It is reviewed on a regular basis. The annual review process is the responsibility of the Social Worker involved with the child/family. It involves all those involved with the child, school, medical personnel, social worker, adoptive parents etc.

**Corporate Parenting** The Local Authority taking the overall view of the child's life (in partnership with social services, education and health).

**SATs** Standard Assessment Tasks taken at ages 7, 11 & 14. Covering core curriculum of Maths, English and Science. The SAT's at 14 cover a much wider curriculum.

**EWO** Education Welfare Officer employed by the Local Authority and responsible for a group of schools. The EWO may have contact with the child and family directly. The EWO has to make sure that families understand and exercise their responsibility to send children to school. They have to take action if this does not happen. They work closely with schools and families.

◆ Admissions Policy - in a Faith School, the policy is set by the Governors who will have criteria which give priority to religious affiliation. Governors of Foundation Schools also set their own admissions criteria. The Local Authority (LA) controls admissions to Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools.

◆ Looked After Children have priority in Admissions criteria. Should you fail to secure a place in your chosen school, you have the right to appeal against the decision. The Head Teacher has to tell you how to do this. The procedure should also be in the School Prospectus.

◆ How are classes organised and the curriculum delivered?

◆ Is there provision for wrap-around care, i.e. before- and after-school care?

◆ Does the school have a range of extra curricular activities?

#### How do you find out about a school?

◆ Word of mouth

◆ School website

◆ Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) report

◆ School Prospectus

◆ Visiting the school, talking to the Head Teacher and observing the school in action. This is the most effective way to make a judgement!

OFSTED Reports need reading with care. A report will give you an impression of the school when the report was written. Schools can change quite rapidly either for the better or the worse (usually for the better!).

A school receiving a poor report might well, within a year or so, be a good school so do not be put off visiting such a school and talking to the Head Teacher about how the school has implemented the recommendations within the report.

## Visiting a School

Make an appointment, do not expect to be able to walk in and be seen. Go armed with your questions, e.g. How do I arrange to see a teacher if I perceive there is a problem? Head Teachers like parents who ask questions.

If you ask a question and you do not feel the answer is adequate, ask a follow-up question.

When shown around the school, try to judge the ethos of the school, look for good relationships between teachers and pupils, between pupils themselves and between the teachers. Note whether the Head Teacher knows the pupils, the quality of the displays of work (are they interesting and well presented?), pupil behaviour (a working buzz is fine, especially when pupils are working together), upkeep of the fabric of the school (is it clean, well decorated, etc.). Is the school practising what it preaches?

Schools today have to work to achieve the five outcomes of a document called Every Child Matters. The outcomes listed below are seen as the right of every child:

- ◆ Be healthy
- ◆ Stay safe
- ◆ Enjoy and achieve
- ◆ Make a positive contribution
- ◆ Achieve economic well-being

You may like to ask the school how it is aiming to achieve these outcomes.

## Educational Jargon

DCSF	Department for Children, Families & Schools
LA	Local Authority (includes a responsibility for all matters concerning education)
LAC	Looked After Children
Foundation Level	Up to age 5
Key Stage 1	5 to 7 year olds (infants)
Key Stage 2	7 to 11 year olds (juniors)
Key Stage 3	11 to 14 years old
Key Stage 4	14 to 17 years old
6th Form	17+
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator: usually one in each school. Responsible for ensuring provision for children assessed as having special educational needs. Works in partnership with parents, teachers, senior management at school
School Action	Where the school recognise that a child has a particular difficulty and takes minor corrective procedures
School Action Plus	Where a child is assessed as having more serious needs, and the school may bring in outside help. This may lead to the Statementing process
Statement of Special Educational Needs	A Statement is granted when all actions in School Action Plus have been followed and in the eyes of the school and outside agencies further work and support is needed to help the child to overcome his/her problems.