



## Information, Advice, and Support Service (IASS) for SEND in Northamptonshire

# Choosing a School: An A to Z of Things to Consider When Visiting a Secondary School for a Child with a Physical Disability

If your child has physical difficulties, you may wish to consider some of the following things when choosing a secondary school. The list may provide you with some useful questions to ask on open evenings. You might also find it helpful to visit the school on a normal school day (by arrangement) to get the feel of what it's like when all the pupils are in school. Secondary school will certainly feel very different after being in a primary school!

### **A. ACCESSIBILITY:**

All schools should be accessible to all pupils, but you may want to look at stairs, ramps, lifts, handrails, doorways or uneven surfaces. Schools should have Access Plans to improve accessibility. So even if a building does not look very easy to get around at present, there may be plans to improve access. Is there a subject area that is inaccessible to wheelchair-users? If so, could a downstairs room be allocated to that subject? Ask!

### **B. BUDDY SYSTEMS**

Some schools have buddy systems, in which peers or older pupils are asked to help more vulnerable pupils. Does the school use this system?

### **C. CHANGING ROOMS**

If your child needs more room for changing for P.E. (such as somewhere to sit or room for someone to help), is there enough space?

### **D. DINING AREAS**

Dining rooms sometimes have tables with integral stools, which may not suit your child. Can an alternative be provided? Are lunchtime supervisors available to help carry trays, or are peers used to help with this?

### **E. EXERCISES**

If your child needs physiotherapy during the day, is there a suitable room available? Nobody wants to exercise in a cupboard or a corridor!

### **F. FURNITURE**

Is the furniture going to be suitable for your child? If not, don't worry too much. Schools should

provide specialist furniture (for example, a science stool with a back and arms), if necessary. If your child already has specialist furniture, are classrooms big enough to accommodate it? Your child's specialist furniture will be transferred to the secondary school (if they need it).

## **G. GAMES**

Schools should include all children in all P.E. lessons. However, some games and sports are more difficult to access, and your child may not cope well with being outside in winter. Some schools have multigym facilities where pupils can work at their own performance level (instead of missing out on the rugby game or freezing on the football pitch).

## **H. HYGIENE ROOMS**

Is there a hygiene room in the school, or is there only a medical room? Schools may have something written in their access plan, but you will want to ask about this.

## **I. I.T. EQUIPMENT AND ACCESS**

Are there plenty of computers available for pupils who have difficulty writing by hand? Do some pupils use smaller, portable word-processors?

## **J. JOGGING BOTTOMS AND SPECIAL CLOTHES**

Are P.E. staff happy to let pupils wear non-standard P.E. kit if needed?

## **K. KIT FOR P.E.**

Can P.E. kit be kept in school to cut down on the amount of baggage going to and from home? However, it might be nice if the P.E. kit goes home to be washed more than once a term!

## **L. LAPTOPS**

If your child has their own dedicated laptop or word-processor, where will it be stored during the lessons when it is not needed?

## **M. MOVING AROUND THE SCHOOL**

Is the school made up of lots of different blocks linked by paths open to the elements? Will this be a problem for children who are less mobile and vulnerable to the cold?

## **N. NERVOUS PUPILS**

Anxious children should have a single named adult to whom they can turn for help (in addition to the support staff who help in lessons). Does the school operate a key-worker support system?

## **O. OUT OR IN?**

Do pupils have to go out at breaks and lunchtimes or can they stay indoors?

## **P. PRINTING WORK**

If your child has a laptop or word-processor for their exclusive use, how will they print off their work?



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## **Q. QUIET AREAS**

Some pupils like to have an area to go to (to escape the hustle and bustle) at breaks and lunchtimes. Does the school have designated areas that are always kept quieter?

## **R. RECORDING WORK**

If your child has difficulties with written recording, what systems are in place in the school to help them?

## **S. STORAGE**

Are there lockers for pupils to store books when they are not needed? If not, can pupils (who have difficulty carrying things) leave textbooks and heavy items in a safe, designated place? This would mean they don't have to carry their books around all day.

## **T. TOILETS**

Sorry, but these are very important! Are there enough accessible toilets around the school site, and are they big enough for wheelchairs, hoists, and helpers? Are they used as a spare cupboard for cleaning fluids, floor polishers, and other sundry items?

## **U. UNIFORM**

If a blazer and tie are going to be uncomfortable or difficult to manage, what alternatives could be found?

## **V. VISITS**

Does the school have a fixed range of visits? All pupils are entitled to go on visits. You may want to ask what arrangements have been made in the past to accommodate all pupils, whatever their abilities or disabilities.

## **W. WORKING TOGETHER**

Liaison between parents and school is essential. What communication channels do the school use to ensure close liaison can be maintained, not just termly but every day if needed?

## **X. XTRA HELP**

Pupils mustn't become too dependent on one adult to support them in school. Because of this, some schools have different support staff for different subjects. Other schools have more consistent support. You may want to ask what arrangements the school usually makes.

## **Y. YOU MAY HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS WE HAVEN'T THOUGHT OF**

Don't be afraid to ask.

## **Z. ERM... WE GIVE UP!**

## **Information, Advice, and Support Service (IASS) for SEND in Northamptonshire**

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