



CHOOSING A SECONDARY SCHOOL

Choosing a secondary school for your child is an exciting but sometimes daunting experience for parents. It may seem that time has passed so quickly, and it was only yesterday that you were deciding on a primary school for your child.



You may be thinking
where do we start?

What questions do we
need to ask?

How do we know it is
the right school?

We recognise this at Adoption Tees Valley and have therefore produced this guide/checklist to try and help parents with the answer to some of these questions.

If you require further information, please contact Leanne Longstaff, Education Support Worker at Adoption Tees Valley.

When to start looking?

You can't apply for a secondary place until your child is in Year 6 (The deadline for secondary applications in England is 31st October) but it is advisable for parents in Year 5 to start visiting secondary schools and considering your choices.

Once you've narrowed down your search, there's plenty you can find out about from the comfort of your home. Spend some time doing a bit of online research, checking out Ofsted. League tables, school websites and local forums.

The Ofsted report is useful however this will just provide you with a snapshot of the school and some of its strengths and weaknesses, but it may be several years out of date. Therefore read the report but don't just necessarily base your decision on this.

What is classed as an Outstanding school academically may not always have a nurturing environment which is something that your child might need in order to thrive. The most important part of the Ofsted report is the targets it sets for a school; these tell you about its weaknesses and the things it needs to improve upon most. Thus the report should be used as a guide, but a visit is always highly recommended.

Most schools hold open days, but it is also beneficial to visit the school on a normal school day, so you get a real feel of what the school is like. You can take your child along with you, so you can gauge their reaction to the school environment, do they feel comfortable there? It is about finding the right environment for your child for them to be happy and thrive.

School Admissions

Adopted children come under the category of Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) or as we like to call them 'Children who were in our care'.

They should therefore be given the highest priority in terms of school admission, even if the school is not in your local authority/catchment area.

However, if the school is a distance from your home, you must consider the logistics of how you will transport your child to school every day.

When applying for a school place you will need to send a copy of the adoption certificate.

When your child starts school, remember to inform the school office that they will be eligible for Pupil Premium Plus. (See our website for more details).

Please check with the schools admission criteria as some schools/academies can differ.



Parent checklist

Below are some suggestions of things to take into consideration when choosing/visiting a school.

- How would you describe the feel of the school – welcoming, friendly?
- How long has the Headteacher and other staff been there for, and what is the vision for the school?
- What is the schools behaviour policy? How does the school deal with bullying?
- How is negative behaviour being managed? Reprimands, sanctions?
- What is their policy on homework?
- How does the school communicate with parents?
- How do they organise transition for children starting school? Is there enhanced transition for some pupils?
- What are the main primary schools that feed into the secondary school?
- Does your child know any children that currently attend the school or will be starting when they do?
- In Year 7 are the children put in to ability group for lessons or do they stay with one class?
- How does the school support more/less able pupils?
- Does the school have any other children that are adopted or looked after?
- In what ways do the school use the pupil premium plus to support the children Has the school/staff had any attachment training?
- Do they have any quiet or chill out rooms for the pupils to use or go to? Do the children have key workers assigned?
- What are the lunchtime arrangements?
- Does it have any facilities that your child would particularly enjoy – swimming pool, sports facilities or drama etc ?
- How will your child get to school – walking distance or school bus available? Is this a happy school and is it the right school for my child?

- Special Education Needs and Disability
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- From the 1st September 2014 it became statutory that all schools share and publish their Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) information on their own school website. This is referred to as an Information Report or SEND Support Offer.
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- If your child had Special Educational Needs, then it is advisable to have a meeting with Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at the school.
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- Parent checklist
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- What is the school's SEN policy?
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- What is the school's inclusion policy?
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- Is the school's behaviour policy adapted for children with Special Educational Needs and disabilities including emotional?
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- Do they promote time in rather than time out?
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- What therapies are available within the school?
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- How would school get to know your child before they start there?
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- How would my child get to know the school, especially in the first few days?
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- How are Special Educational Needs, like my child's met?
-
- Does school have experience of helping children with similar needs to my child?
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- How close is the school to your home?
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- How big is the school site and how many levels does the building have?
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- Is it easy to get around the school, could your child get to all areas of the school easily?
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Parent checklist

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- What is the schools SEN policy?
- What is the school's inclusion policy?
- Is the schools behaviour policy adapted for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities including emotional?
- Do they promote time in rather than time out?
- What therapies are available within the school?
- How would school get to know your child before they start there?
- How would my child get to know the school, especially in the first few days?
- How are Special Educational Needs, like my child's met?
- Does school have experience of helping children with similar needs to my child?
- How close is the school to your home?
- How big is the school site and how many levels does the building have?
- Is it easy to get around the school, could your child get to all areas of the school easily?
- Are the classrooms self-contained or open plan?

- Are there quiet room/chillout/calm down rooms for the pupils to use or go to?
- Is there access to sensory equipment or facilities?
- Does your child need 1:1 work, if so where does this take place?
- How will teachers be informed about my child's SEN?
- What are the class sizes and how many members of staff are in the classroom?
- How does the lunchtime system work? Is there provision for them to go into lunch early (especially if they don't like noise and crowds)
- Is there any visual aids e.g. timetables around the school?
- Visual stimuli – Is the classroom an engaging environment?
- How is your child's medication needs met and by whom?