

Fact sheet 21

Applying for places at Lower, Middle and Upper Schools in Bedfordshire

This fact sheet gives advice about:

- Choosing a school for your child
- Planning your child's first few weeks of Lower School or
- Moving up to Middle School.

It will give you information on:

- When children start or move up schools in Bedfordshire
- Choosing and visiting schools
- Applying for a place at your preferred schools
- Possible free school transport
- Practical ways you can help prepare your child for their education.

Introduction

Deciding which school you would prefer your child to attend is an important decision for any parent. For most parents their own education involved moving from one school to another, with little or no choice, and few people went anywhere but their local school.

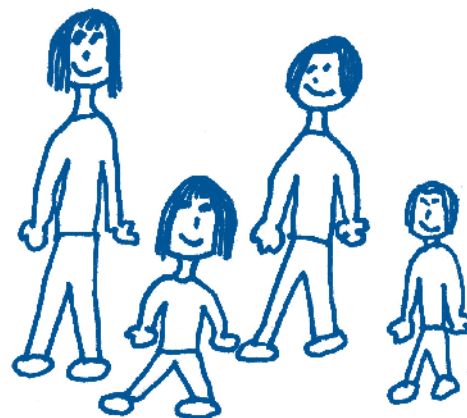
The Government wants to increase parental choice of their children's education, so you, as parents, are able to apply for any non-fee paying schools you wish to. If more children apply for a place at a school than there are places available, each school has agreed rules which Admissions use to allocate the places. These rules are called the admissions criteria.

Schools are not able to keep waiting lists for their school places, and Head Teachers cannot guarantee a place will be available. All parents must complete one application form to list their first three preferred schools. This means all applications are treated equally and fairly.





Schools in Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire is one of only a few counties which still have a three tier or stage system for educating children. Children in Bedfordshire attend Lower, Middle and Upper Schools.

- Lower Schools are for children aged 4+ - 9 (Foundation Class and Years 1, 2, 3 & 4)
- Middle Schools are for children aged 9 – 13 (Years 5, 6, 7 & 8)
- Upper Schools are for children aged 13 – 16 or 13 – 18/19 (Years 9, 10, 11 or Years 9, 10, 11, 12 & 13).



Drawing by Sarah Kerr.

Bedfordshire schools			
Pre-school/ Nursery Class	Lower school	Middle School	Upper School
			
Aged 3 -4 Apply direct to the Pre-school	Apply July – Sept in the school year your child has his/her third birthday		Children aged 13 to 16 (or 18/19 if staying on to Sixth Form)
Attendance of a Pre-school at a Lower School does not automatically mean that your child has a place in the school's Foundation Class. You will need to apply July - Sept in the school year your child has her/his third birthday for a Lower School place.	Children aged from 4 to 9* Foundation Class – aged 4 -5 Year 1 – aged 5 - 6 Year 2 – aged 6 – 7 Year 3 – aged 7 – 8 Year 4 – aged 8 – 9 <small>*Age ranges differ for St Vincents Catholic Lower School, Houghton Regis for 2007</small> Apply Sept – Nov of Year 4 for Middle School place	Children aged 9 to 13 Year 5 – aged 9 – 10 Year 6 – aged 10 – 11 Year 7 – aged 11 – 12 Year 8 – aged 12 – 13 Apply Sept – Nov of Year 8 for Upper School place	Year 9 – aged 13 – 14 Year 10 – aged 14 – 15 Year 11 – aged 15 – 16 Sixth Form (not compulsory) Year 12 – aged 16 – 17 Year 13 – aged 17 – 18

Applying for a school

There is a Lower, Middle and Upper school which serves your area. This is known as your **catchment school**. You can check which schools these are on the Bedfordshire County Council's website, www.bedfordshire.gov.uk under the Admissions sections. As long as you put your catchment school as one of your three choices, and return it on time, your child will be given a place. (Dates for returning admissions application forms are in the admissions booklet for each age group).

You are able to express a preference for any school you wish, but if it is a popular school and it is not your catchment school, you may not get a place.

It is advised that parents consider applying for their catchment school as well as other choices. This is because you will be given a place at your catchment school if the other schools you list above your catchment school, are full. If you do not include your catchment school in your list of preferred schools, your child will be allocated a place at the nearest school with a vacancy. This may be some distance from your home. **You would be responsible for transporting them** for four or more years.

What happens if too many children apply for a school?

If too many children apply for a place at a school, **the school's admissions criteria or rules will be used to decide who gets a place.** In the admissions booklet you will see that admissions criteria differ from school to school.

How can I find out about local schools?

You may have heard other parents talk about your local schools, or read in your local paper about OFSTED reports (independent inspection teams review each school every few years). It is a good idea to collect together as much information as possible about the schools in your local area to help you make an informed decision.

All schools must have a prospectus. The prospectus will tell you about the school's strengths, the curriculum, times of the school day, the uniform, out of school activities and much more. Some schools have their own websites; the Bedfordshire County Council's website (www.bedfordshire.gov.uk) has a link to these. (See the Schools Admissions page, under Education & Learning.)

There are a number of websites where you can enter your postcode and get a list of all the schools in your area. They will also have links to relevant reports about them.



Drawing by Sarah Kerr.

The Parent Partnership Service produces a list of useful school admissions websites (see our contact details in the back of this booklet).

It would be a good idea to look at the latest OFSTED report for each school you are considering. (OFSTED reviews do not take place every year, so the latest report may be a few years old and things may have changed either for the better or worse.) You could also ask each school for a copy of the Special Educational Needs Policy and the Behaviour and/or Anti-Bullying Policy.

The County Council's Admissions booklet will tell you:

- the number of children attending each school
- how many places are available for the new intake for each school
- the number of places that were available last year and
- how many places were applied for.

If last year the number of people applying was less than the number of places available, your child may have a good chance of getting a place at your preferred school, even if you do not live in the catchment area.

Most Middle and Upper Schools have open evenings for prospective parents early in the autumn term. If you can't make the open evening, or if you need further information, you can telephone the school you are interested in and ask to visit the school. Schools are very busy so you need to plan this well in advance.

If your child has special educational needs you may want to make an appointment to speak to the

SENCO on your visit. **The Parent Partnership Service's booklet 8 "Looking at Schools"** may be helpful.

When do I need to apply?

Applying for a Lower School place?

You must apply for a Lower School place by the September after your child's third birthday.

You need to collect an application form and admissions booklet from any Lower School or Pre-school. This admissions booklet will tell you the exact deadline by which you must return your completed application. If your child attends a Pre-school linked to a Lower School, this will not guarantee your child a place in the Foundation Class – you will need to complete an Admissions Application as with all schools.

You will receive a letter from the Admissions Service in late December telling you which school your child has been given a place at.



Drawing by Sarah Kerr.

Applying for a Middle School place?

At the beginning of your child's Year 4 school year, you will receive an application form and admissions information from your child's lower school. You will need to return the completed application by 1st December and will hear by letter where your child has a Middle School place by the end of March.

Applying for an Upper School Place?

When your child is in Year 8 you will receive an application form and admissions information. Your completed application form needs to be returned to the Admissions Service at County Hall by 1st November. You will be informed, by letter, at the beginning of March which school your child has been allocated a place at.

Applying on line

You can apply online for Lower, Middle or Upper School places via the internet. It is possible to use the internet, without charge, at most main libraries.

(Internet address: www.bedfordshire.gov.uk/onlineadmissions)

Moving into an area after everyone else has applied?

If you move into an area after the closing dates for admissions applications; to start or transfer to Lower, Middle or Upper School, you will need to apply as soon as you can. If you need a new school for your child immediately, telephone Admissions Service, who will be able to tell you which local schools have places. Most schools like to meet the parents and the child before they start at a school, even if it is after the beginning of a school year.

Your admissions application form for transferring to a Middle or Upper School will be counted as a late application and so your application will be dealt with differently from those received before the deadlines. The Admissions Service will explain to you what will happen and when you are likely to hear which school your child has been allocated at.

Further information about applying?

If you need further information contact either the Admissions Service, (contact details at the back of this booklet), or the School Transfer Adviser or your child's school.

Ideally you need to make a decision about schools you wish to apply for at least a year before your child is due to change schools. The earlier you plan, the more time you will have to visit and compare schools. This is especially important if your child has any additional or special educational needs.

If your child has a Statement, or is on School Action or School Action Plus, you will need to have started your plans even earlier. For example, when your child's Statement or Individual Action Plan (IEP) is reviewed in Year 3, you will also need to discuss their transfer to Middle School at the end of Year 4.

The Parent Partnership Services's Fact sheet 22 "Starting and applying for schools in Bedfordshire if your child is supported on School Action or School Action Plus" maybe helpful.

Home to School Transport?

Generally parents are responsible for their child's journey to and from school; however, Bedfordshire County Council does provide free transport in certain circumstances. Free school transport is provided to children with statements only where appropriate. It is expected that children with statements of SEN will attend the nearest appropriate school. You can obtain a full copy of the policy from the County Council (contact details are in the back of this booklet).

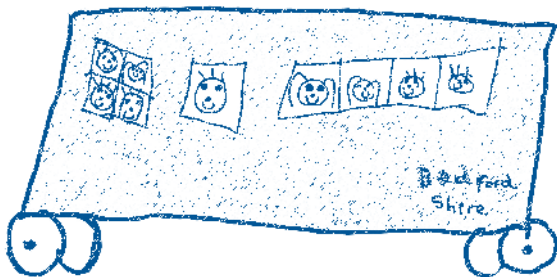
Free transport is usually provided if you applied for the school place on time, your child is aged 5 – 16 years and they:

- Go to their designated catchment school; or
- Go to the appropriate school nearest to their home which is able to offer them a place

And if they

- Live more than 2 miles (under 8 years of age) or 3 miles (8 years of age and over) away from the school.
(The distance is usually measured using the shortest walking distance from the child's home to the school.)

In addition, for low income families, children aged 8 – 11 will be provided with free transport to the



Drawing by Jasmine Ajayi.

nearest suitable school, if the school is more than two miles from the family home. For low income families of children aged 11-16, free transport will be provided for any of the three nearest suitable schools, providing the one they attend is more than 2 miles and less than 6 miles from their home. A low income family is defined as one whose children are entitled to free school meals, or who receive the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

For denominational schools, children of low income families aged 11-16 will be provided with free transport to the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief, where they live more than two miles but not more than fifteen miles from the school.

When will I hear whether/if my child has a place at the preferred school?

If you applied by the normal deadline, you can expect to hear, by letter about your child's school place for:

- Lower School places – after mid December
- Middle School places – after mid March
- Upper School places – after the beginning of March.

If you are happy with the offer made to you

If you are happy with the offer made to you, you will need to **return the reply slip sent to you with the offer, by the date requested to secure this school place.** (This shows you have accepted the school place for your child.)

What can I do if I am not happy with the school place offered to my child?

If you are unhappy with the school place offered to your child, you are able to appeal for any of the schools you applied for. **You cannot appeal for a place at a school if you did not list it as one of your original three preferred schools.**

The Admissions Service will send you details about the appeals process with your offer letter. Your child's name will be added to the waiting list for the school ranked 1st on your original Admissions Application form automatically, and if a place becomes available the first on the list will be offered. The waiting lists are based on distance from school to home, so if a family moves into the area and lives nearer to the school than you do, they will be moved further up the list than you. The waiting lists are kept until the end of the summer term. You can ask to be kept on a waiting list after this date, if you would like to.

It is not uncommon for one or two places to become available after the start of the school year if you are not successful with an appeal.

Helping your child prepare for their first school.

Many children go to Pre-schools, often on the same site as a Lower School. This helps children get used to routines and being away from their parents or carers. There are a number of things you can do to make your child's move to school easier.

Practicalities:

- Children at school need to be able to dress themselves and do up their own shoes. Make it a game at home until they feel confident to do it all by themselves.
- Children need to be able to go to the toilet alone, and wash their hands.
- Children need to be able to eat independently so help them get used to cutting up their own food and using cutlery.
- Children need to be able to identify their own belongings. You could make a game of picking out their things from amongst all the family belongings. It isn't always helpful to kit them out with all new belongings just before they start term as they won't recognise anything. Labelling their clothes and shoes will help the teachers help your child too.

Emotionally ready for school

- Your child is likely to need lots of encouragement and reassurance. Talk about the new adventure in positive ways. Tell your child what you liked about your school and the things you did. Find out about your child's new school day so you can talk about it together.
- Encourage your child to play with other children, of other ages too. This will help increase their confidence and independence. Practise being away from your child so both your child and you get used to being separated.
- Your child will be asked questions by teachers and class mates without you being there to answer for her/him. Practise asking questions like her/his name, her/his address, her/his likes and dislikes etc. Encourage your child to ask for help if she/he can't do something, rather than you interpreting her/his needs or actions.

- Point out the school whenever you pass it so they see it regularly.
- Read some positive books about starting school. The BBC website recommends “Topsy & Tim Start School” by Jean & Gareth Adamson or “Starting School” by Alan & Janet Ahlberg. Your Library is likely to be able to get these books for you.
- For your own reassurance you could ask the teacher what strategies she/he will use to settle the children.
- A few weeks before the start of term, try to get your child into their new term time routine. Try to get them used to the bedtimes and getting up times they will have once school has started. Get your child to help you get together the things they will need. Write a list and get them to tick off things as you get them ready.
- Even though you may be upset try to send your child off with a smile on their first day. Try to be at the school gates early before and after school, as a few minutes can seem like a long time to a four year old waiting for his mum or dad.

Useful Contacts

School Admissions Service – Children’s Services, Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford. MK42 9AP

School Admissions General Enquiries –
Tel: 01234 718 120

Home – School Transport – Transport Section, Customer Contact Centre, County Hall, Bedford.
Tel: 01234 228 431

School Transfer Adviser – Jo Maule, C/o Parent Partnership Service, Westfield Middle School, Chester Road, Bedford. MK40 4HW Tel: 01234 316 444 (Tuesday-Thursday)

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Chester Road, Bedford, MK40 4HW
Telephone helpline: 01234 316 353

Further Information

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Leaflet 8 – “Looking at Schools”

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Fact sheet 22 – “Starting and applying for schools in Bedfordshire if your child is supported on School Action or School Action Plus”

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Fact sheet 23 – “Starting and applying for schools if your has a Statement”

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Fact Sheet 24 – “Useful School Admissions Websites”

These leaflets and fact sheets are available from the Parent Partnership Service, or may be downloaded from their website:
www.bedfordshireparentpartnership.co.uk