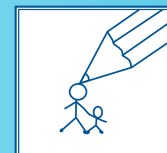


Parent Partnership

Service



Fact sheet 22

Starting and applying for schools if your child is supported on Action or Action Plus

This fact sheet gives advice about:

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

It will give you information on:

- The age 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.

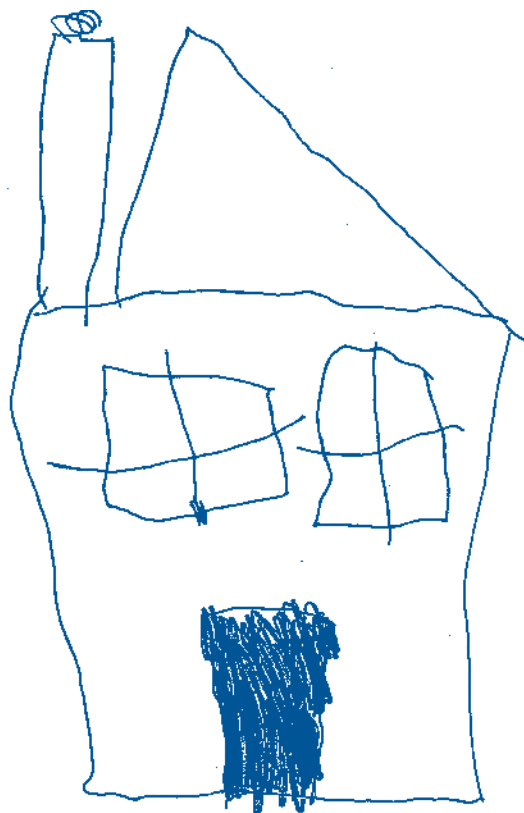
Introduction

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

Most children who have additional or special educational needs (SEN) do not need or have a Statement. They do, however, need additional support within mainstream education (see the

Parent Partnership Service's leaflet number 2 – School Action and School Action Plus).

All children on Action or Action Plus will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that is reviewed at least twice a year to make sure your child is making progress. Planning for transfer to a Middle School or an Upper School needs to start when your child is in Year 3 or Year 7. Usually, your school will discuss this with you when the IEP is reviewed in the summer term of Year 3



Drawing by Ruby Ajayi.

or Year 7. This is so you can start thinking about and planning which schools you might apply for.

Children who are on Action or Action Plus apply for school places at the same time and in the same way as children who do not have special educational needs. They are not given any priority over other children. It is a good idea to plan early so that you have plenty of time to visit schools, collect information and talk to Head Teachers and/or SENCos (Special Educational Needs Coordinators).

Children with a Statement are usually allocated their school place before all other children. If your child has a Statement or you are in the process of applying for a Statement, you may find the **Parent Partnership Service's –Fact sheet 23– “Starting and applying for schools if your has a Statement”** useful.



Drawing by Westfield Middle School.


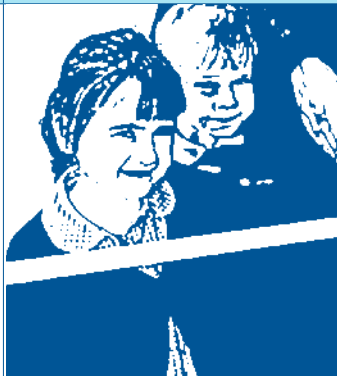


Schools in Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire is one of only a few counties which still have a three tier or stage mainstream 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)

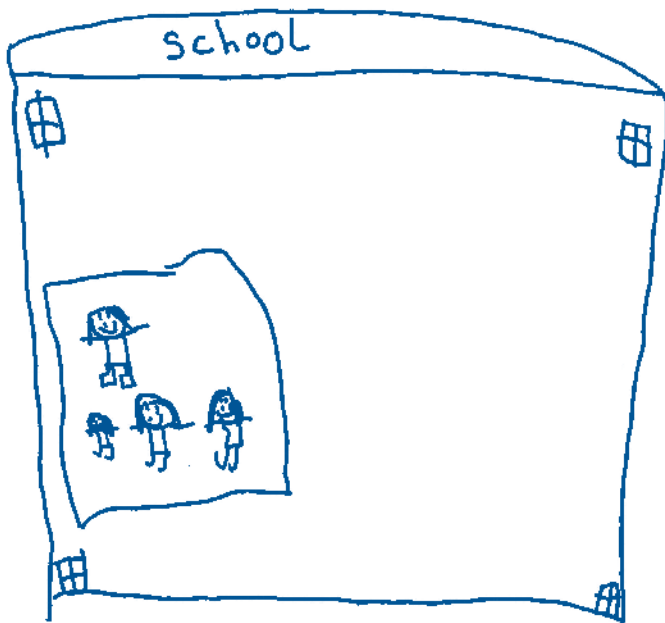
There is a Lower, Middle and Upper school which serves your area. This is known as your **catchment school**. There are a number of mainstream schools that have special provisions attached to them. Places in these provisions cater for various special educational needs and are usually for children who have a Statement. For a small number of children with special educational needs which are not able to be met by mainstream education, there are a number of special schools in the county.

Bedfordshire schools

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

Choosing and visiting 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). One family's experience of one school may vary from another's. It is therefore a good idea to collect together as much independent information as possible about the schools in your local area (as well as visit as many potential schools) to help you make an informed decision.



Drawing by Maya Acton.

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 School Admissions page, under Education & Learning.)

There are a number of websites which give you a list of all the schools in your area when you enter your postcode. They will also have links to relevant independent reports about them. 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.) OFSTED reports tell you about the strengths and weaknesses of the school at the time of inspection. If an OFSTED report about a school you were considering, says that one area of study is weak and your child enjoys this area of study, you may wish to ask a specific question about this when you visit.

It will be very useful to ask each school you are considering for a copy of their Special Educational Needs Policy and the Behaviour and/or Anti-Bullying Policy. These policies should tell you, in general terms, how the school delivers additional help and support to pupils through Action, Action Plus or provides extra help for pupils who have a Statement. It is a good idea when you visit to also speak to the Head Teacher and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (Senco) about how the school will help meet your child's individual needs.

The County Council publish an Admissions booklet for Lower School entry and one for Middle and Upper School admissions. As well as telling you, in detail about how to apply for a school place, the booklets 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 being allocated a place, even if your child does not have a Statement or live in the catchment area.

Most Middle and Upper Schools have open evenings for prospective parents early in the autumn term, when most parents will be considering which schools to apply for.

If you can't make an 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.

The Parent Partnership Service's booklet Number 8 "Looking at Schools" may be helpful.



Drawing by Lucy Williams.

Applying for a school if your child is being supported at School Action or School Action Plus

Children who are being supported at Action or Action Plus apply for school places at the same time and in the same way as children who do not have special educational needs. You as parents are able to apply for any non-fee paying schools you wish to. You fill in **one Admissions Application Form** with up to three preferred schools and return it to the Admissions Service in the County Council by a given deadline. This means all applications are treated equally and fairly. If more children apply for a place at a school than there are places available, each school has agreed rules which the Admissions Service use to allocate the places. These rules are called the **admissions criteria**.

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.

Schools are not able to keep waiting lists for their school places, and Head Teachers cannot give guarantees to parents before the Admissions Service have allocated the school places, that places will be available.

It is a good idea to plan early so that you have plenty of time to visit schools, collect information and talk to Head Teachers and or SENCo's (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators).

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 at that school – 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.

Applying for a Middle school place?

Early in the autumn term, when your child has started Year 4, you will receive an application form and admissions booklet 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)

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



Drawing by Lucy Williams.

list for the school ranked 1st on your original admissions application form automatically, and if a place becomes available at the first school on your list, it 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.

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 the 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 to which school your child has been allocated.

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 Action or 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 look ahead and discuss their transfer to Middle School at the end of Year 4.

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:

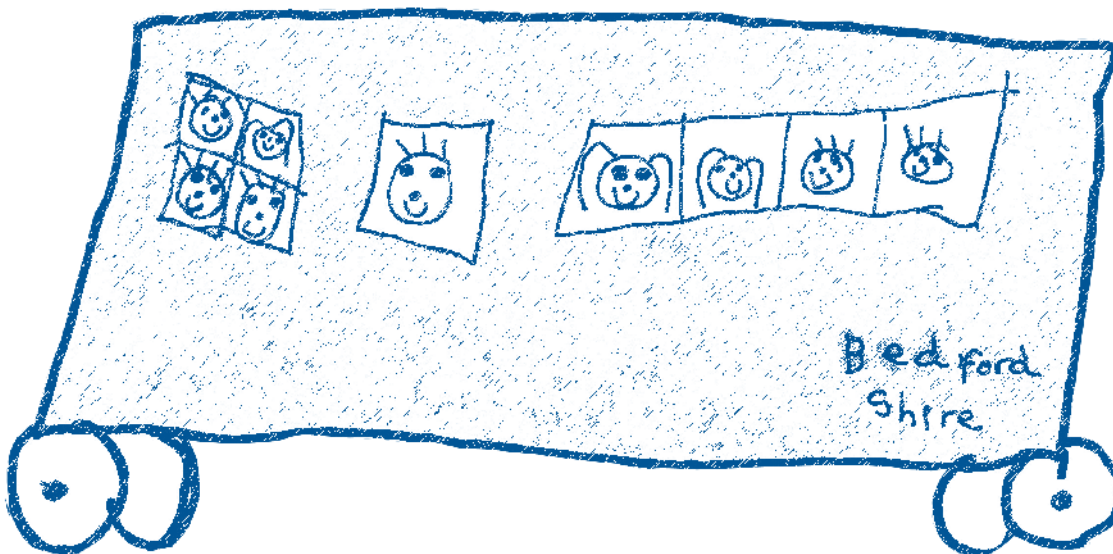
- Go to their designated catchment school; or
- Go to the appropriate school nearest to their home which is able to offer them a place

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 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.



Drawing by Jasmine Ajayi.

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.

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.

Children have a variety of special educational needs. If your child has co-ordination or learning difficulties some of these suggestions may not apply, but if you have been supported by any of the Early Years Support Services, they will be able to suggest how you can help your own child prepare. Start to plan with your child's first school as soon as you can, so that you are aware of what the school will expect and the school are fully aware of what support your son or daughter will require.

Here is a list of suggestions which may make your child's move to school easier.

Practicalities:

- Children starting at school usually need to be able to dress themselves and do up their own shoes, as best they can. Make it a game at home until they feel confident to do it all by themselves.
- Ideally children need to be able to go to the toilet alone, and wash their hands.
- Children ideally should be able to eat as independently as possible, 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.



Drawing by Sarah Kerr.

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. MK41 9SF Tel: 01234 316 444 (Tuesday-Thursday)

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

Other guidance – Jo Brown, Area Education Office, Tel: 01234 228 118

Further Information

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Leaflet No 8 – “Looking at schools”

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Fact sheet 20– “Helping your child prepare for their first school”

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Fact sheet 21– “Applying for places at Lower, Middle and Upper Schools in Bedfordshire”

Bedfordshire Parent Partnership Service – Fact sheet 23– “Starting and applying for schools in Bedfordshire if your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs”

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