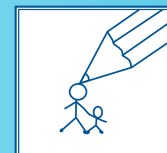


Parent Partnership

Service



Fact sheet 23

Applying for schools in Bedfordshire if your child has a statement of special educational needs and practical advice for starting school

This fact sheet gives advice about:

- Thinking about suitable schools
- Applying for a school for your child
- Moving up to Middle School or Upper School.

It will give you information on:

- The age at which children start or move up schools in Bedfordshire
- Choosing and visiting schools
- Applying for a place at your preferred schools
- Transport to school
- 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.

If your child has special needs, but does not have a Statement, please see

- **Parent Partnership Service's leaflet number 2 – School Action and School Action Plus** and
- **Parent Partnership Service's fact sheet number 22 – Starting and applying for schools if your child is supported on Action or Action Plus**

Children with a Statement are usually allocated their school place before all other children.

If your child has a Statement and is already at school you, as parents, will be asked for your views on which school you would like your child to move up to, as part of the Annual Review process in Years 3 & 7.

If your child is under statutory school age (5 years old) and has a Statement, you are likely to be having review meetings every six months. In the summer term of the school year your child has their third birthday, you will need to agree with the Assessment and Monitoring team a suitable Lower School for your child to move into the Foundation Class.

Schools in Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire is one of only a few counties which 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 –18/19 (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. 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 provisions attached to a mainstream school and special schools in the county.

Only a small percentage of children with statements are considered for special provision, such as special schools.

Bedfordshire schools			
Pre-school / Nursery Nursery Class	Lower school	Middle School	Upper School
			
Aged 3 - 4 Apply direct	Children aged from 4+ to 9*	Children aged 9 to 13	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. Following discussions with Assessment and Monitoring, complete your school transfer form. July - Sept in the school year your child has her/his third birthday for a Lower School place.	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 Primary School, Houghton Regis</small> Following discussions with Assessment and Monitoring, complete your school transfer form. Sept – Nov of Year 4 for Middle School place	Year 5 – aged 9 – 10 Year 6 – aged 10 – 11 Year 7 – aged 11 – 12 Year 8 – aged 12 – 13 Following discussions with Assessment and Monitoring, complete your school transfer form. 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

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 a school may vary from another's. Try to collect as much independent information as possible about the schools in your local area and visit any potential schools to help you make an informed decision.

All schools have a prospectus which 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 has a link to these. (www.schools.bedfordshire.gov.uk/ssites.htm)

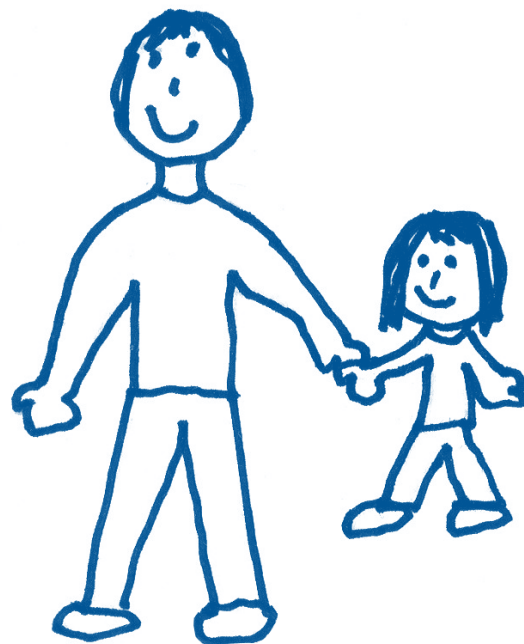
There are a number of websites which give you a list of all the schools in your area when you enter your postcode. They will also have links to relevant independent reports about them. The **Parent Partnership Service** produces a list of useful websites about school admissions and performance (see our contact details at the back of this fact sheet).

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 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 School Action, School Action Plus or provides extra help for pupils who are statemented.

The School Admissions Service publishes an Admissions booklet for Lower School Admissions and one for Middle and Upper School Admissions. As well as telling you, how to apply for a school place, the booklet also 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.



Drawing by Sarah Kerr.

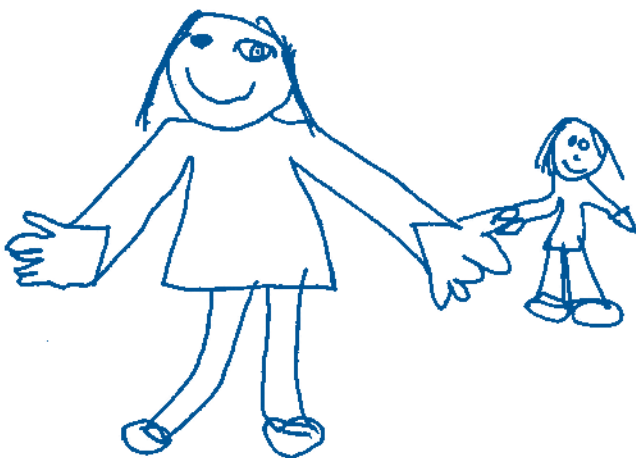
Most Middle and Upper Schools have open evenings for prospective parents early in the autumn term, when most parents will be considering which schools to apply for.

If your child has a Statement you should think about visiting schools and going to open days or evenings in the autumn term when your child is in Year 3 or Year 7, a year earlier than most parents.

If you can't make an open evening, or 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.

It is also a good idea to speak to the Head Teacher and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), when you visit, about how the school will help meet your child's individual needs.

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



Drawing by Westfield Middle School.

Applying for a school if your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs

Children with a Statement are considered separately from other children in terms of the admissions criteria or rules. Children without a statement receive an Admissions Application form in the autumn before they change schools. For children who have a Statement, the process should begin much sooner. Places for children who have a Statement are usually finalised and parents informed before all other children are allocated places.

Children under 5

If your child is under statutory school age (5 years old) and has a Statement, you are likely to be having review meetings every six months. In the summer term of the school year your child has their third birthday, you will discuss a suitable Lower School for your child's Foundation Year with the Assessment and Monitoring service.

Children already at school

If your child is already at school, you are likely to be discussing your choice of school during the statementing process or during the Annual Review process when your child is in Year 3 or Year 7. **This means you should be thinking about visiting schools and going to Open Day/ Evenings in the autumn term when your child is in Year 3 or Year 7, a year earlier than most parents.**

If your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs you, as parents, will be asked for your views on which school you would like your child to attend. If you request a special

provision or a special school for your child, your preference will be put to a Provisions Panel who decide whether they agree this is the most appropriate setting for your child. If the Provisions Panel agree with your request for a special school or provision, the panel will approach the nearest appropriate school. The school will have 15 days to decide if they are able to meet your child's needs.

The school can only object if:

- they cannot meet your child's needs
- placing your child at their school is not an efficient use of resources
- placing your child at their school will affect "the efficient education of all children with whom your child will be educated".

You will be told as soon as possible which school is to be named on your child's Statement of Special Educational Needs.

If you receive an Admissions Application form and you have already agreed the next school for your child with the Assessment and Monitoring service, please list the school in Section B and complete Section E on the Admissions Application form.

When will I hear about my child's school place?

An Amendment Notice naming the proposed new school will usually be sent to you in the autumn term. A Final Statement naming the school will be issued by 15th February before your child starts their new school in September.

Parents of children who do not have a Statement, including those supported at School Action and School Action Plus, are told about which Middle or Upper School their child has been allocated a place at, in March.

Further information about applying

If you need further information you can talk to your child's school, Assessment and Monitoring service, the Admissions Service or the School Transfer Adviser. (Contact details at the back of this fact sheet.)

Remember, the earlier you plan, the more time you will have to visit and compare schools.

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

If you are unhappy with the school place offered to your child, you are able to:

- telephone the Assessment and Monitoring Service and discuss your concerns
- talk to the Parent Partnership Service about your options
- meet with the Assessment and Monitoring Service.

If, after talking to the Assessment and Monitoring Service, you feel you are not able to agree a way forward and the Statement has been made final, you have the right to request mediation and/or go to tribunal. The Mediation Service is not

part of the Local Authority. It offers the chance for an independent person to become involved in finding a solution. You may also be able, if applicable and if you so choose, to appeal to a Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST). This is an independent tribunal set up by an Act of Parliament. The Tribunal hears and decides parents' appeals against the decisions of the Local Authority. The Parent Partnership Service or the Assessment and Monitoring Service can provide you with further information about either of these options.

There is a time limit of two months for any claim to be lodged with SENDIST.

If your child's Statement is more than a year old, you may only appeal for the same type of school that your child is already attending, i.e. mainstream or a special school unless your child's needs have changed and parts 2 and/or 3 of the Statement have been amended.

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 at the back of this fact sheet).

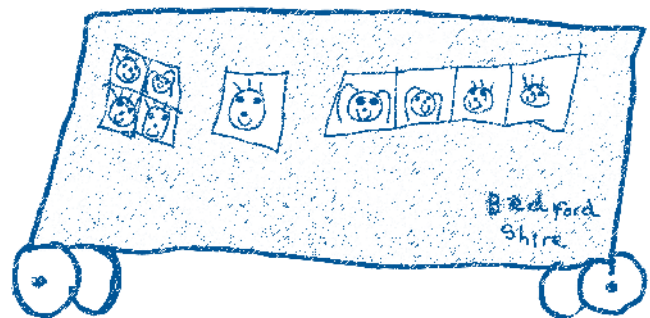
Free transport is usually provided if you applied for the school place on time, your child is aged 5 – 16 years and they:

- 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.)

Information about school transport to Church of England, Catholic and other denominational schools is available in the Authority's Admissions booklets.



Drawing by Jasmine Ajayi.

Helping your child prepare for their 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 Statements of Special Educational Needs for a variety of reasons. If your child has severe co-ordination or learning difficulties some of these suggestions may not apply. 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.

Children with Statements about to move up school are often given the opportunity to visit their new school a few times, not just on "Transfer Day". Generally the "receiving" school will welcome any requests from feeder schools or parents for a more carefully planned and more in-depth transfer process to familiarise your child with the new school building and staff.

Here is a list of suggestions which may make your child's move to school easier, however schools cannot refuse to take your child because they are not able to do some of the things listed.

Practicalities

- At school children 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 will 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.
- Encouraging your child to play with other children, of other ages too, will help increase their confidence and independence.
- Practise being away from your child so both of 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 such as their name, address, likes and dislikes etc. Encourage your child to ask for help if they can't do something, rather than you interpreting their needs or actions.
- Point out the school whenever you pass it, so they recognise it.
- 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 can get these books for you.

- For your own reassurance you could ask the teacher what strategies she/he will use to settle the children.
- To help your child to adjust, a few weeks before your child starts school you could
 - begin their new term time routines (bedtimes and getting up times),
 - Write a list of things they will need regularly at school and practice finding them together,
 - Chat regularly to your child about a typical school day.
- Even though you may be upset, try to send your child off with a smile on their first day. Try to be prompt before and after school. A few minutes can seem like a long time to a four year old.

Useful Contacts

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

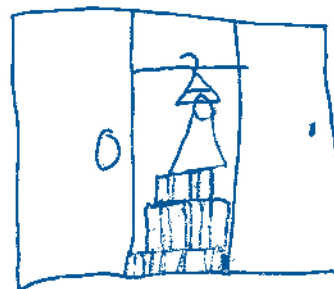
School Admissions General Enquiries –
Tel: 01234 718 120

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

Bedfordshire County Council’s Assessment & Monitoring Team – Tel: 01234 228 292

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
Tel: 01234 316 353



Drawing by Lucy Williams.

Further Information

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

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

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 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