

Special Educational Needs
and Disability Information,
Advice & Support Service

sendiass

in Suffolk

Choosing a School for a child with SEND



Information,
Advice & Support
Services Network
for SEND

www.suffolksendiass.co.uk

Getting started

Choosing a school can feel like an overwhelming responsibility for parents and carers, particularly when they have a child who has Special Educational Needs and/or a Disability (SEND). Gathering information, discussing your thoughts with others and feeling well informed, can help you feel better prepared to make the right decisions for your child.

Most children with SEND will go to a mainstream school and are often supported by the Local Offer.

You can find out more about Suffolk mainstream schools on the local authority website:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/find-a-school-in-suffolk/

You can find out more about the full range of services and opportunities across Education, Health and Social Care for children and young people with SEND, **including information about special schools in Suffolk**, on the Suffolk Local Offer website: **www.suffolklocaloffer.org.uk**

Schools, through their admissions authorities, cannot refuse to admit a child simply because they have SEND or because they do not have an EHC plan.

Each school must publish a SEN information report explaining how they identify and support children with SEND. If you cannot find one on a school's website, you can contact them and ask for a copy.

Schools must provide information about their arrangements for the admission of disabled pupils to the school and publish an 'Accessibility plan' explaining adjustments they can make and ongoing plans to improve access.

To find out more about how children with SEND are included and supported in the early years, at school and in college see our website **www.suffolksendiass.co.uk**

How do I know which school to choose?

Every child is unique and therefore everyone's experience will be different. Staff at Suffolk Sendiass do not recommend specific schools when talking with parents and carers.

However, we can suggest a number of things you might want to consider, when you are looking at schools, to help you make your decision.

It's a good idea to visit schools so you can have a look at the environment and meet the staff. Most schools offer open evenings or days, where the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCo) is usually available.

Prepare a shortlist of schools you want to visit:

- Begin with your local schools.
- If you are considering a school further away, ask about the transport arrangements before you apply.
- Consider at least two schools so that you can compare what is offered
- Take your child's views into account where possible

Ofsted rating, academic results and the opinions of other parents often influence choices. These can all be useful, but every child is unique, and it is important to consider your child's needs and how and where they might best be met.

The way the school day is organised might be a factor, the length of lessons or access to breakfast, lunch time and after school clubs.

The physical environment might be important, for example, if your child would benefit from access to a calm-down area what spaces are available in school.

Prepare before you visit a school

Make a checklist of all the things that are important to you and your child. This will help you to ask the right questions.

Have a look at the school SEN information report, SEN policy and, if relevant to your child how this links to the school behaviour policy. These policies should be on the school's own website.

Visiting schools

If you are going to an open day or evening, it may not be possible to have an in-depth discussion with staff there and then. If, after your visit, you still have questions, you can request a separate visit and meeting to discuss your child's individual needs in more detail.

Along with your list of questions, take any relevant information about your child, such as their EHC plan or any specialist reports which suggest how to support your child's needs. It is a good idea to discuss strategies of support with the SENCO at the school. Ask about what school have done for other children and how they could support your child.

Can I defer my child's start date?

Children usually start school full-time, in the Reception Year, in the September following their fourth birthday.

Primary schools must offer a full-time place at the start of the Autumn term in September. However, legally a child does not have to start full-time education until the school term after their fifth birthday.

It is important that you apply for an infant or primary place for the Autumn term following your child's fourth birthday, and that they are attending full-time education by the term after their fifth birthday.



Making an application

If your child has an EHC plan – please see information on pages 11-13

Even with an EHC plan, if you intend to apply for a mainstream school place you should follow the normal application process as it helps the local authority and the school with planning places.

See: www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions.

The application form for a school place asks you whether your child has an EHC plan. This information is then shared by the admissions authority with the local authority Family Services Team who manage EHC plans.

For all applications, when applying for a mainstream place, you have the option of identifying your three most preferred schools. As a rule, you should put your most preferred school as your first option.

When identifying your preferred schools, you should also be clear on how your child will get to and from school if they are offered a place. For more information see: www.suffolkonboard.com/school-travel/

Each of your three preferred schools will be considered equally and separately. Listing second and third preferences will not affect your child's chance of being offered their first preference. It is recommended you apply for more than one school. **A place at any school, including your catchment school, cannot be guaranteed.**

Each school publishes a set of oversubscription criteria. This explains how places will be offered if there are more applications for a school than places available. These can vary depending on the school.

Be aware that when applying for some schools such as those which are voluntary controlled, voluntary aided, foundation, academy or free schools, you may need to complete a Supplementary Information Form (SIF).

Read more within the local authority admissions web pages:
www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions

Moving schools (known as 'In-year applications')

If your child has an EHC plan and you want to move schools, you should speak with your school SENCo and contact the Family Services team at the local authority to discuss the move.

Where there is no EHC plan, Suffolk County Council co-ordinates the offer of school places to all community and voluntary controlled schools. For **in-year applications to voluntary aided, foundation, free schools or academies, you will need to apply to the school directly.** It can be useful to send a copy of your application to the local authority admissions too.

If you want to move your child to a new school during the school year, or join the school in a different age group from the school's normal year of entry, School admissions have some useful information including a guide on transferring schools: www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions

If your application for a school place is unsuccessful you will have the right of appeal. Schools, including academies and free schools, must have regard to the School Admissions Code and SEND Code of Practice.

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 says:

"Where a child or young person has SEN but does not have an EHC plan they must be educated in a mainstream setting except in specific circumstances:

Admissions authorities:

- must consider applications from parents of children who have SEN but do not have an EHC plan on the basis of the school's published admissions criteria as part of normal admissions procedures
- must not refuse to admit a child who has SEN but does not have an EHC plan because they do not feel able to cater for those needs
- must not refuse to admit a child on the grounds that they do not have an EHC plan" (1.27)

Appealing

This information is for appeals without an EHC plan. If you want to appeal the school or type of school named in an EHC plan, please see our leaflet 'Appealing to the SEND Tribunal'

It can be an unsettling time if you have not been offered a place at your preferred mainstream school. Take time to consider the school place which has been offered. Try to visit the school if you have not already done so. It may be difficult, but it will help if you can be calm and reassuring when discussing this with your child.

You have the option of appealing to one, two or all three of your preferred schools if they have been refused.

There is no guarantee of success at appeal. We recommend that you think about what your back-up plan will be should your appeal be unsuccessful.

Accepting a place at another school should not affect your appeal.

Details of how to make an appeal, the appeal form and guidance information can be found at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/school-places/education-admission-appeals-and-permanent-exclusion-reviews/>

An appeal is your opportunity to fully explain your reasons for wanting the school place and raising your concerns about the impact of this decision. You can also appeal if you think your application was not treated correctly or in accordance with admissions law.

Infant class size (appeals for reception and Years 1 & 2)

Classes in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 should not contain more than 30 pupils for every single qualified teacher. This means that it is very difficult to win an appeal where the reason for not offering a place is due to 'Infant Class Size'. See the appeals guidance for more on this.

Making an appeal

Gather your evidence...

- Consider your reasons for appeal and try to write them down as clearly and simply as possible.
- Remember the appeal panel do not know you, your child or their personal circumstances.
- Explain any difficulties your child is likely to experience and how they might be affected if they don't attend this school.
- Describe what you believe this school can offer that others cannot.
- If possible, ask your child's current school or nursery for any paperwork that might help, for example any information about your child's current needs or level of support they require.
- Ask professionals and specialists working with you and your child whether they can provide you with any supporting letters or reports.
- Include documents which evidence any relevant health needs
- School websites can be useful as they are required to publish information about how they support children with SEND. Look at their SEN & Behaviour policies, School Prospectus, Ofsted report and SEN Information report.
- Find out what you can about the setup of classes in the school, and whether they have previously exceeded their Published Admission Number (PAN)

- Explain what you have gathered from visiting the school and what it is that makes you feel it is the right school for you child. For example, the physical environment, how you saw children being taught, what you know about the curriculum which matches the needs of your child, and what facilities are available etc.
- If school location and start or finish times are an issue, perhaps due to other family members attending different schools use a map to help you explain routes. The appeal panel may not know the local area at all.
- Consider what the appeal panel may question you about, for example Is there another school with places which also offers breakfast and after school clubs which would help with start and finish times? If so, be ready to explain that you have explored other schools and why they will not be suitable.

You don't need all your supporting evidence before completing the appeal form. You can send further information later if you are waiting for a report from a professional for example



Choosing to Home Educate

(known as Elective Home Education or EHE)

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 says:

“Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents have the right to educate children, including children with SEN, at home. Home education must be suitable to the child’s age, ability, aptitude and SEN. Local authorities should work in partnership with, and support parents to ensure that the SEN of these children are met...” (10.30)

Schools must not seek to persuade parents to educate their child at home by way of avoiding exclusion, or due to poor attendance.

Home educating a child requires a lot of dedication, hard work and patience. Being both parent and teacher can be very challenging. For some parents it is a rewarding option which works well for them and their child, but it is a big decision to make.

Parents consider EHE for many reasons, for example if they are being threatened with prosecution for non-attendance. However, if your child is struggling at school or refusing to go, if they are extremely anxious, have sensory needs which are overwhelming or at risk of exclusion, electing to home educate may not necessarily be the answer in the long term. There may be support or other options which better meet your child’s needs and family circumstances.

Take time to explore options and find out as much as you can about home educating so you can make an informed choice. There are many websites offering information and advice, and you may be able to find a local support group of other parents making the same choice. You can also contact the local authority EHE team for more information:

www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/schools/elective-home-education-ehe-educating-your-child-at-home/

How do I elect to home educate?

You should write to the school your child currently attends. If your child attends a mainstream school they will be removed from the register and school must inform the local authority, who will contact you.

If your child has not yet started school you do not have to tell anyone, but the local authority ask that you let them know.

If your child is currently attending a special school, you will need to get permission from the local authority before they can be removed from the school register

EHE and EHC plans

The local authority has no duty to provide education (or secure the special educational provision outlined in an EHC plan) if you have elected to home educate your child, provided they are satisfied the arrangements you have made are suitable.

Where there is an EHC plan the local authority retain responsibility for maintaining the plan for example carrying out annual reviews. As you will be assuming responsibility to educate, you must carefully consider how you can provide what your child needs. The commissioning body are still responsible for any health care provision detailed in an EHC plan though you can make your own alternative arrangements for health provision too.

Requesting a school or college to be named in an EHC plan

The law says that when an EHC plan is first issued or when the local authority writes to you with proposed amendments (at annual or early review), you have 15 days in which to respond and you can request a particular school to be named in the plan. **This includes requesting a special school** (maintained, academy or free).

The SEND Code of Practice says:

"The child's parent or the young person has the right to request a particular school, college or other institution of the following type to be named in their EHC plan:

- maintained nursery school
- maintained school and any form of academy or free school (mainstream or special)
- non-maintained special school
- further education or sixth form college
- independent school or independent specialist colleges (where they have been approved* for this purpose by the Secretary of State and published in a list available to all parents and young people)" (9.78)

Specialist Support Centres (SSC's) and Pupil Referral Units (PRU's) are categorised in law as mainstream education.

Provided it is a type of setting listed in the box above, the local authority **must** consult with the setting, asking if they can meet the needs of your child and giving them 15 days in which to respond.

The local authority must consider any response from a setting very carefully before deciding whether to name them in an EHC plan.

Some Independent schools have also opted in and are included in the lawful list of schools you can request. View the list of approved independent schools and colleges, known as 'section 41' schools: www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-special-schools-and-colleges

For an independent school not on the list, you can 'make representations' (request and give your reasons) for it to be named. The local authority must consider your wishes but there is no conditional duty to name even if the school can offer a place.

Dual placement

The SEND Code of Practice says:

"Children with EHC plans can attend more than one school under a dual placement. Dual placements enable children to have support from a mainstream and a special school. This can help to prepare children for mainstream education and enable mainstream and special schools to share and develop their expertise in supporting children with different types of SEN. In order for a child with SEN who is being supported by a dual placement to be deemed as being educated at a mainstream school they should spend the majority of their time there" (9.85)

An example might be where a child attending a special school has made good progress, and it is felt they may benefit from more opportunities to develop their social or communication skills.

If you think your child or young person would benefit from a mix of mainstream and specialist education, you can discuss this with their current school and with the Family Services Team at the local authority.

Can the Local Authority refuse to name my chosen school on the EHC plan?

The local authority may only reject your request to name your chosen school where:

- The school or other institution is unsuitable for the age, ability aptitude or special education needs of the child or young person.
- The attendance of the child or young person would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for others
- The attendance of the child or young person would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources" (SEND Code of Practice 2015, 9.79)

Mainstream education cannot be refused on the grounds it is unsuitable. Where a nursery, school or college is named in an EHC plan, they **must** admit the child or young person.

What if I disagree with the school named in the EHC plan?

Where you disagree with the named school (or that there is no school named) in an EHC plan, you have the right of appeal. You can read more about this in our leaflet '**Appealing to the SEND Tribunal**'



Where can I get more information, advice and support?

Find out more by:

- Reading our information online about Choosing a school for a child with SEND at: **www.suffolksendiass.co.uk**
- Reading more about the School Admissions process in Suffolk: **www.suffolk.gov.uk/admissions**
- Looking at the Suffolk Local Offer for information about the range of support and services available for children and young people with SEND

SENDIASS can give you:

- Information about choosing a school and how children with SEND are supported in education
- Advice about the School Admissions and Education, Health and Care plan processes
- Support with applying for a school place and with appeals

Further Information

View our other information leaflets and resources at
www.suffolkSENDiass.co.uk/leaflets



Information: You may find it helpful to look at our other leaflets and information on our website, social media channels and through our workshops and courses.



Advice: We provide unbiased information and advice about what the law says, the local authority's policies and procedures, and about the policy and practice in local schools or other settings.



Support: We can help you by listening to your views and concerns, and working with you to explore your options.

Useful Links

Activities Unlimited (short breaks and leisure activities for disabled children and young people up to age 25 in Suffolk)
www.activities-unlimited.co.uk

Anglia Care Trust (local SEND mediation services)
www.angliacaretrust.org.uk

Contact (for families with disabled children) www.contact.org.uk

Child Law Advice (education law advice for families)
www.childlawadvice.org.uk

Council for Disabled Children (umbrella body for the disabled children's sector) www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk

IPSEA (national charity providing legally based information advice and support) www.ipsea.org.uk

SEND Code of Practice (explains the statutory duties of schools and local authorities) www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

SEND Tribunals Service (organisation responsible for handling claims)
www.justice.gov.uk/tribunals/send

The Source (for young people in Suffolk) www.thesource.me.uk

Suffolk Local Offer (for the full range of services and support for children and young people with SEND) www.suffolklocaloffer.org.uk

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and Disability Information,
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in Suffolk

Providing confidential and impartial information, advice and support to help children, parents and young people take part in decisions that affect their lives.



www.suffolksendiass.co.uk



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ADVICE4ME to 87007



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