



Choosing a School.

Checklist for choosing a school.

1. The school.

Obtain a prospectus of the school (whether Local Education Authority (LEA) maintained or independent fee paying) and check, where applicable:

- (a) Type of School, e.g. boys, girls, co-educational,
- (b) Age range of pupils,
- (c) Sixth form facilities.

Parents should try to visit the school on a normal working day. If it is a boarding school, check means of home/school contact and policy on illness.

Make notes of general impressions and personal comments on the school. Include details such as extra curricular activities, etc.

2. Staff.

Check the prospectus or ask how many are:

- Full time; part time; visiting; visiting consultants (e.g. psychologists)
- What qualifications and experience have they?

Are all staff members made aware of the SpLD child's difficulties? How is this done?

Enquire whether "In-service Training" is encouraged. (These are short courses of "refresher" or "up-date" training for practising teachers).

Parents should meet as many staff members as possible.

3. Curriculum.

Check the prospectus and ask about:

- Foreign languages - is there a flexible policy, e.g. are languages compulsory, can they be taught orally? (some SpLD/dyslexic children cope with foreign languages, some find the written aspects very difficult).

- Humanities - science and mathematics - crafts and technology - business studies - computer science (subjects which many SpLD/dyslexic children enjoy).
- Physical education - what facilities are available for individual activities other than team games?
- It is important for children to find an enjoyable physical activity, and sometimes they prefer the individual as opposed to the team activity.
- A co-operative attitude from the PE instructor towards the child with poor co-ordination is very important.

4. Admission/acceptance of pupils.

(a) Ask about the policy for acceptance of pupils with SpLD/dyslexia

(b) Ask what criteria and procedures are used for admission, for example: Is there an entrance examination; if so are there any concessions for dyslexic pupils? Will consideration be given to the psychological assessment and/or recommendation?

5. Staff for teaching SpLD/dyslexic children.

Enquire about qualifications and experience of specialist teachers. Have they undertaken special courses? Your Local Dyslexia Association should be aware of courses relevant for teachers of SpLD/dyslexic children.

Ask if extra/special support is available in other subjects, as well as English, i.e. arithmetic, history, science.

You and your child must meet the staff who will be giving the specialist help.

6. Specialised tuition/timetable.

Enquire what teaching programmes are used. Again, your Local Dyslexia Association should be able to tell you about the most effective programmes currently used for helping these children. The lessons: Are they individual or group? If group, enquire number of pupils.

How many periods per week? How many hours per week? How does the specialised tuition fit into the general timetable? (Cutting out subjects/activities children particularly enjoy should be avoided).

Is any special equipment employed? e.g. computers, tape recorders.

Is there an additional fee for the specialised help? (Some independent schools make an extra charge, others do not).

Are there any bursaries/grants available, if so, how much?

What lessons do these children attend with their peers? (In some schools SpLD children spend most of their day in a Unit for children with special educational needs, joining their peers for non-academic activities only - in others, children attend the Unit only for their specialised tuition, etc.).

7. What provision is made for parents to discuss progress/problems with subject/specialist teacher?

The partnership between home and school needs to be candid, frank and based on mutual respect.

8. How is discipline administered?

Is there a reward system? Does it reward effort as well as attainment? Why are children punished (dyslexic children etc.).

9. How often are reports sent?

Once a year, once a term, etc. What do they contain? Constructive reports inviting discussion are more useful than a few short phrases against each subject name.

10. Examinations.

Ask if there is flexibility in the choice of Examination Board.

Ask if provision is sought for SpLD/dyslexic candidates from Examination Boards. Enquire whether similar concessions are permitted for internal examinations (e.g. end of term examinations).

Find out for what examinations SpLD/dyslexic pupils are entered.

Are other public examinations used, e.g. English Speaking Board, Royal Society of Arts, City and Guilds.

11. Parent choice in the maintained system.

Parents have a right to express a preference for a maintained school. In general, if there is room in the school, a child must be admitted if the parents wish him/her to attend.

Maintained schools include those funded by the LEA and those that are grant maintained. There are also voluntary-aided and special agreement schools, which are usually church schools. All maintained schools have to make provision for children with special educational needs, including dyslexia. All maintained schools must have a Special Educational Needs Policy giving information to parents.

It is the duty of Local Education Authorities and Governors to comply with any preference expressed by parents. A parent in expressing a preference does not need to choose a school in a particular Local Education Authority. A child can be sent across a boundary.

The child must be admitted unless the admission would prejudice the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources or in the case of a selective school if the child is unsuitable by ability of aptitude. Every school has an admissions policy which explains the criteria they will use to offer places if the school is over-subscribed. Typical criteria give preference to children who have elder brothers or sisters at the school or who live within the shortest distance from the school. Some schools, generally church schools, can refuse a child if

he/she does not have a religious background. If any school is not full it must admit all children whose parents want them to go there.

If their child is not admitted to the school of their choice, parents have a right to appeal which must be explained in the letter refusing their child a place.

Further information may be available from your Local Dyslexia Association.

(See [Local Dyslexia Associations](#).)

12. Independent and non-maintained schools approved by the DfES for pupils with SpLD.

A few schools have been approved by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES formerly DfEE) under Section 347 of the 1996 Education Act as being specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties.

There are not many such schools, as they have to fulfil very specific regulations. Approved schools are marked DfES on Supporting Corporate Members.

a. The Local Education Authority is only allowed to send a child with a statement of special educational needs to an independent school if:

The School is approved by Secretary of State for Education, The Secretary of State for Education agrees that the child can be educated there. (Section 347 (5))

b. Parents can appeal to the SEN Tribunal about the school named on their child's statement.

They may wish their child to attend a particular school.

They must confirm in writing that there is a place.

They must check whether it is an approved school.

c. If it is not an approved school.

Parents should write to the Secretary of State at the DfES asking for 'enabling consent', and confirm in writing there is a place.

The SEN Tribunal Office has forms for these purposes.

Department for Education & Skills

Tel: 020 7925 5000

Web: www.dfes.gov.uk

The Tribunal Secretariate has a free information booklet

'Special Educational Needs Tribunal - How to appeal'.

It explains the importance of the documentation that should be sent in at the time the appeal is made. It is difficult to send in evidence at a later date.

Tel: 01325 392 555

13. CReSTeD.

CReSTeD, Council for the Registration of Schools teaching Dyslexic Pupils maintains a list of schools which meet CReSTeD criteria.

Tel: 01242 604 852

Fax: 01242 604 852

Email: crested@crested.org.uk

Web: www.crested.org.uk

14. State school obligations.

State schools have an obligation to meet the needs of dyslexic pupils. See "Special Educational Needs - a guide for parents and carers".

Department for Education & Skills

Tel: 020 7925 5000

15. The British Dyslexia Association and grants.

The BDA is unable to give grants or bursaries for private assessments or for tuition for children, or for teachers wishing to train.

'The Educational Grants Directory' and other books. Libraries and careers offices may have reference copies.

Available from the Directory of Social Change

Tel: 020 7209 5151

Fax: 020 7209 5049

Email: info@dsc.org.uk

Web: www.dsc.org.uk

