



FOR PARENTS | TRANSITIONS

Setting Comparison Guide

Understanding your options when choosing the right school or provision for your child



There is no one right setting for all children with SEND. The right setting is the one that can meet your child's specific needs. This guide sets out the main options and what to consider when making the decision.

Mainstream school with SEN Support

A standard school that provides SEN Support from its own resources.

Potential advantages

- Your child stays within their local community and peer group
- Provision can be adjusted without changing school
- SEND Code of Practice applies fully

Points to consider

- May not be able to meet complex or specialist needs
- Quality of SEN Support varies enormously between schools
- Can feel isolating if support is not well integrated

Mainstream school with a resourced provision

A mainstream school with an attached specialist unit or resource base for pupils with specific needs.

Potential advantages

- Access to specialist support alongside mainstream education
- Usually has trained specialist staff
- Your child can access mainstream lessons and the wider school community

Points to consider

- Places are limited and often oversubscribed
- The mainstream and specialist elements do not always work seamlessly
- Not available in every area

Special school

A school specifically for children with SEND, usually for children with moderate, severe or complex needs.

Potential advantages

- Staff trained in SEND
- Lower pupil-to-staff ratios
- Environment designed around specific needs
- Peers who understand similar challenges

Points to consider

- Can limit access to mainstream academic curriculum
- Geographical catchment is wider, which usually means longer travel times
- Transition to adulthood pathways may differ

Independent special school

A specialist school not maintained by the local authority, often for complex or rare needs.

Potential advantages

- May offer provision for needs that cannot be met elsewhere

Points to consider

- LA must agree to fund and name it. This is often contested



- Often highly specialised
- Named in Section I of EHCP if the LA agrees it is necessary

- High cost can make LA reluctant
- Family may need to appeal to secure placement

Alternative provision

Education outside a mainstream or special school: tuition, PRUs, online provision.

Potential advantages

- Can be appropriate during a crisis or transition
- More flexible than a fixed setting
- Sometimes easier to arrange quickly

Points to consider

- Not a long-term solution for most children
- Quality varies considerably
- May not meet EHCP requirements without careful planning

Questions to ask any setting

Can you describe how you would meet my child's specific needs as set out in their EHCP? What specialist training do staff have? How do you involve parents? What does a typical day look like for a child with my child's profile? What is your approach to transition, both into the setting and on from it?

Your right to express a preference

You have the right to express a preference for a specific school in your child's EHCP. The LA must name your preferred school unless it would be unsuitable for your child's needs, would adversely affect other pupils, or would be an inefficient use of resources. If your preference is refused, you can appeal.