

Checklist for visiting colleges

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities

A guide for parents and carers

When a young person moves on to further education we (Special Educational Needs (SEN) Service, parents/carers and young people) will look at which college can provide the appropriate courses for them. The young person and their views should be at the centre of this process - but they will need support. To enable you to do this you might want to visit a number of colleges to ensure that you are properly informed before you express any preference. Each college will have different arrangements for parents/carers and young people to visit the college and you should contact the college initially.

It will be essential that the visit is arranged in advance and at a time which will be convenient for both you and the college.

You might like to consider the points below to help you get the most from your visit. They are only suggestions and it is important that you add any other questions or points that you think are particularly relevant, or important, for you and the young person. It may be a good idea to write down the questions you want answered and take them with you. Also make sure that you have enough time available and that you are given enough time in college to look around and ask questions.

Before you visit a college

- Read the college's online information very carefully, eg SEN information, SEN policy and think about what the college will need to do for the young person and how they can help you.
- Think about what you would like to find out, the questions to ask and the people you would like to meet.
- Ask for and read the college's own brochure/prospectus.

Visiting the college

- Arrange the visit at a time when young people will be in the college.
- Try to spend enough time in the college to allow you to make an informed decision.
- First impressions are important but you should base any decision on a range of responses, experiences and the information you gather.
- You may want to consider arranging an initial visit to the college without the young person - but you should return with them later.
- You may want to visit the college with a friend or relative with whom you can discuss important issues later on.
- Think about how the young person will travel to and from the college.

- Consider the actual travelling time involved and the daily arrangements you will need to make.
- Try, if possible, to meet the staff who could be involved with the young person - the student support staff, teachers and learning support assistants.
- The person showing you around is there to help and will be pleased to answer your questions. You may wish to make another appointment to talk further with the staff, especially if you feel that there are queries you still need to clarify. You may be able to do this over the telephone, or maybe by email.

In the classroom

It may be helpful to explore:

- how the structure and timetable of the week and the teaching and learning in class will meet the young person's needs
- how the individual needs of young people are met
- which adults work with the young people and their role in supporting the young person
- whether there are other young people in the college with similar needs
- what arrangements there are for you, as a parent, to discuss their progress and contribute to target setting and planning, learning opportunities, including homework.

External support

It may be helpful to explore:

- which external professionals visit the college, eg speech and language therapist, educational psychologist, occupational therapist, if this is relevant to the young person's own needs
- How advice from visiting professionals is implemented
- whether the young person would have to miss the same lessons or subjects to regularly work with any visiting professionals.

The college in general

It may be helpful to explore:

- any special adaptations and equipment the young person may need?
- how the young person will be supported outside lessons - in particular lunch and break times
- whether any extra activities are available after college
- whether there are opportunities to meet with parents of other young people at college, perhaps through organised meetings
- if you will be asked to contribute towards the cost of anything else, eg books, organised trips, extra equipment

- the range and condition of equipment/resources in classrooms, workshops
- what the ICT (information and communication technology) facilities are like
- ask the college what their expectations are of their young people and parents
- it may be helpful to explore the college's behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Do they match your expectations?
- does it have links with other colleges – perhaps to provide support or for learning opportunities?
- if the college is a mainstream college are there opportunities to access outreach support from a special college?

College atmosphere - overall impressions

- Does the college feel welcoming?
- Try to imagine whether the young person would be happy in the college.
- Do the young people seem well behaved/happy?
- If there is anything you do not understand or are not happy with don't be afraid to ask or speak about it there and then.

After the visit

- Discuss your thoughts and feelings about the college with the person you went with, or with your partner, a relative or friend.
- Telephone or visit the college again if you want more information, perhaps with the young person this time.
- If the young person has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or is undergoing an EHC needs assessment, please feed back your views to the SEN Caseworker based at the Children's Services Department as soon as possible.
- It is important that you are happy with the educational arrangements for the young person and that you are confident that the college can meet their needs.

Residential colleges

Additional points to think about and questions to ask:

- Find out what links there will be between the college and you, such as home visits or letters/emails.
- Find out how and when you will be contacted about progress.
- Find out how and when you will be contacted if there is a problem.
- Arrange to meet the person who will be responsible for the overall care of young people out of college hours.
- Visit the dormitory or bedroom the young person will use.
- What privacy will the young person have?
- Will the young person know who to go to if they are worried or have a problem?

- What arrangements are there for the young person to telephone home or receive telephone calls?
- What arrangements are there if the young person needs attention or is ill during the night?
- What are the bathroom facilities and routines?
- What arrangements are there for medical care?
- What opportunities will there be for the young person to join out of college activities, for example youth groups, sport, other leisure activities?
- Will the young person get the same opportunities to shop, cook, clean and relax as he or she would at home?
- If it is proposed that they remain at college over the weekend, what would be the range and programme of activities?
- It is important that you are happy with the residential arrangements for the young person and that you are confident that the college can meet their needs.

What help can SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) give?

SENDIASS provides confidential and impartial advice, information and support to parents and carers at all stages of their child's school and college life, from pre-school early diagnosis through to leaving college. Their service is available to all families for whom special educational needs play a part. Their service offers:

- a confidential telephone helpline service
- a website where you can view information about the service and a range of resources relating to educational issues
- individual support by telephone or email or in person if appropriate.
- someone to listen to your views and concerns, and help you to explore your options
- help to understand your child's rights around education
- help with discussions with your child's school/college, the local authority and other agencies so that your concerns are heard
- help to express your views in writing and at meetings
- someone to explain jargon and help you to understand complicated forms and documents
- support through the statutory assessment process towards an EHC plan
- trained volunteer Independent Parental Supporters (IPS)
- support and advice around fixed term and permanent exclusion
- information about the independent mediation services offered by the local authority
- information about other agencies and organisations who may be able to support you.

If you require any assistance or advice please contact:

SENDIASS

Tel: 0808 164 5504

Email: info@hampshiresendiass.co.uk

Website: www.hampshiresendiass.co.uk

How to find information about colleges

- **Hampshire Local Offer website** <https://fish.hants.gov.uk/localoffer>
- **The college website** - this is a very useful source of information which would usually include a statement about ethos and values, the college's admission policy, the college's special educational needs policy, links to Ofsted reports. Colleges may also include information about examination results and where young people go after they leave college.
- **The college prospectus** - this will contain a range of information about the college. You can request a copy from the college.
- **The college Ofsted report** - this is a detailed report from the Office for Standards in Education. They also produce summaries which give a useful overall picture of a college. You can access the latest Ofsted report from the college's website or from the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.
- **Government Education Statistics** - these are published by the Department for Education (DfE) and are available at www.gov.uk/schools-colleges/data-collection.

You can download this document at <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/sen-checklist-visiting-colleges.pdf> or request a hard copy by contacting childrens.services@hants.gov.uk or 0300 555 1384.

For a copy of this document in another language or format (eg large print or in an audio format) please contact **0300 555 1384, childrens.services@hants.gov.uk or Textphone 0300 555 1390.**

Calls to 0300 numbers are included in call packages, or charged at the same rate as 01 and 02 numbers. Costs may vary depending on your telecoms provider and whether you are calling from a landline or mobile. Further information about call charges can be found at www.ofcom.org.uk.