

Choosing a school for your deaf child checklist

We use the term 'deaf' to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss such as glue ear. We use the term 'parent' to refer to all parents and carers of children.

Introduction

This factsheet contains a checklist of the questions you might like to ask when you visit a school; you can adapt the checklist to include other questions you have. We recommend that you try to ask the same questions when you visit each school to help you to make comparisons. There is also a list of the information to collect before visiting a school.

The checklist focuses on the facilities and staffing specifically for deaf children, but if your child has additional needs then you will also want to gather other information.

We have included separate sections with specific questions to consider if you are considering sending your child to a:

- a mainstream school
- a special school
- a residential school.

There is space at the end for you to include your own comments, and record any comments that your child makes.

The Appendix provides more information about school inspections.

Contents

Information to collect before visiting a school	1
Information to collect during a school visit	2
Residential schools	10
Notes	14
Appendix: School inspections (for all schools including residential schools)	15
Further information about inspections	16

Information to collect before visiting a school

You can ask for this information by writing to or emailing the head teacher and/or visiting the school website.

Find out if the school has an open day that you can attend. This is useful for a first visit. It is also worth making a second visit during a normal school day, checking with the school whether the day you're visiting on is a good example of a 'typical' school day.

Name of school:		
	Requested	Received
School prospectus or handbook		
Name of head teacher, school name, address, phone or textphone and fax number, email address, website address		
Inspection report and a copy of any action plan ¹		
Information about the academic achievements of deaf children and other children at the school over the past three years		
A copy of the school's accessibility plan, or accessibility strategy or (if in Scotland) the Disability Equality Scheme		
A copy of the school's equality information and objectives statement (state-funded schools only)		
SEN Information report (England)		
SEND School Offer (England)		

Information to collect during a school visit

If you need an interpreter for your visit to the school, talk to a member of staff before you go, so that arrangements are made. If you need a sign language interpreter, the school should normally fund this.

General information

Number of children at the school	
Number of children in the class my child may join	
Number of children identified as having special educational or additional support needs	
Number of children who have statements of special educational needs/Education, Health and Care plans (EHC plans), ² or Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs), or coordinated support plans (CSPs) (Scotland)	

¹ School inspections are carried out by different bodies in the nations of the UK. In England, inspections are carried out by Ofsted, and inspection reports are available from reports.ofsted.gov.uk. In Wales, reports by Estyn can be found at www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection. Reports on schools in Northern Ireland can be found at www.etini.gov.uk/publications/type/inspectionreports and for schools in Scotland, go to education.gov.scot/inspection-reports.

² Significant changes in education legislation are taking place in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England statements have been replaced by Education, Health and Care plans (EHC plans) since September 2014. For more information on the changes taking place, visit our website at www.ndcs.org.uk/sen.

Are there any other deaf children in the school? If so, how many and what are their ages?	
What test/exam results have previous deaf/disabled pupils attained?	
Where have past deaf/disabled pupils moved on to (college, university or work)?	
How often are statements/EHC plans, or individual education plans (or other planning documents for children with special educational/additional support needs) reviewed and how will I be involved?	
Are all teachers qualified?	
Number of support staff and the qualifications they have	
What deaf/disability awareness training have staff received and when?	
What training have staff received on equal opportunities, particularly disability equality? When did they receive it and how often will it be updated?	
Does the school follow the full curriculum and which subjects do the children study?	

If my child needs adaptations to the curriculum who will make sure this happens?	
How often are there parent days or evenings?	
How often do parents receive written reports?	
How does the school communicate with parents on day-to-day matters?	
How will my child be included in all school activities, including any after-school activities? For example, would communication support be provided?	
Can my child's transport be rearranged to collect my child at the end of after-school clubs?	
My child needs a special diet, will this be provided?	

Facilities and environment

Have any of the classrooms been adapted for deaf children?	
Are there any carpets or curtains in classrooms? This can help improve the listening environment for deaf children.	
Are any of the ceilings very high? This can make the listening environment more difficult for deaf children.	
Is there any treatment to the surfaces of walls and ceilings to reduce sound echoing?	
Is there good lighting?	
How are deaf/disabled children included in assemblies?	
Is there a loop system or soundfield system for assemblies and are speakers advised on how to use radio aids?	

Does the school have any specialisms, such as technology or languages?	
--	--

For more information about the steps that schools can take to make sure there are good listening environments in place for your child, visit www.ndcs.org.uk/acoustics.

Medical

If your child has any extra needs, you may want to include questions that are more specific to your child.

How many staff have a first aid qualification?	
When did they get their qualifications?	
Is there a qualified nurse on site?	
Does the qualified nurse have any sign language qualifications or deaf awareness skills?	
What links are there with local health services?	
If my child needs medication during the school day which member of staff (if any) will administer it?	
What procedures does the school have for recording and dealing with accidents?	
How are parents told about accidents?	
My child has a serious allergy, how will the school manage this?	
If my child has an allergic reaction and needs medication immediately, will there be more than one member of staff trained to do this?	
How are all staff (including lunchtime supervisors and temporary staff) told about my child's allergy? Is it included in their statement/EHC plan, or individual education plan (IEP) or coordinated support plan (CSP) (Scotland)?	

In England, the Department for Education has issued guidance called Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions, which you can download from

www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--

3. This guidance sets out the duties that schools have to make arrangements for children with medical conditions.

Technology

How often will hearing aids, cochlear implants or any other hearing technology be checked?	
Who will be responsible for checking hearing aids, cochlear implants and radio aids?	
Will the school take responsibility for keeping a supply of additional equipment such as hearing aid batteries or test boxes for checking aids?	
What training will staff receive on available technology and how often will training be undertaken?	
Will my child have to be taken out of school for new earmoulds?	

Are the following available?

	Tick if 'yes'	In which areas of the school?
Subtitles for any TV or online video programmes (such as YouTube videos)		
Soundfield system		
Fire alarm with a visual warning, such as flashing lights or a pager system		
Textphone (minicom)		
Radio aid		

Social and emotional support

Will other pupils have any deaf/disability awareness training? If so, when and how often will it be updated?	
--	--

Will my child have support at playtime and lunchtime?	
At playtime, do the supervising staff have any sign language qualifications or deaf awareness skills?	
Does the school have a policy on dealing with bullying and how is bullying monitored on a day-to-day basis? Does, or will, the bullying policy make specific reference to the needs of deaf children?	
What arrangements can be made for my child to receive further support if they need it, such as a mentor or counsellor?	
Are there opportunities for my child to receive peer support from other deaf children, from the same school or nearby? Would the school be happy to help facilitate this?	

More information on the steps that primary and secondary schools can take to prevent bullying can be found at www.ndcs.org.uk/bullying.

Resources to promote deaf awareness within schools can be found at www.ndcs.org.uk/deafaware and www.buzz.org.uk/looksmilechat.

Resources for teachers on how to set up a peer support scheme for deaf pupils can be found at www.ndcs.org.uk/buddyup.

Resource provisions in mainstream schools

What training do mainstream staff receive on the needs of deaf/disabled children?	
How often do mainstream staff receive training?	
What training will mainstream staff receive on the specific needs of my child?	
Have mainstream staff received any deaf/disability awareness training? If so when?	

If mainstream staff have received deaf/disability awareness training, when will it be updated, how often, and who gives the training?	
What percentage of time will be spent in the resource provision or mainstream classes and how is this decided?	
What size group will my child be in when they are in the resource provision?	
What size group will my child be in when they are in the mainstream class?	
What level of support will my child receive when they are in mainstream classes and who will provide the support?	
Will my child be asked how they would like to be supported or is the support the same for every deaf/disabled pupil?	
Are there any deaf/disabled pupils or adults in the school? If not, will my child meet deaf/disabled pupils and adults regularly?	

Resource provisions and special schools for deaf children

What communication approach does the school or unit follow?	
My child's home language is not English. What can the school do to provide accessible information?	
How many deaf children is the school or resource provision funded for?	
How many deaf children are there now?	
How many deaf children does the school expect there to be in the future?	
How many teachers are there in the unit?	

Are all the teachers qualified Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs)?	
How many support assistants are there?	
What qualifications do support assistants have?	
What training do support assistants receive and how often?	
What sign language qualifications or deaf awareness skills do support assistants have?	
What sign language qualifications do Teachers of the Deaf have?	
Is training in sign language offered to parents and if so, how often?	
What level of deaf awareness training do teachers and support staff have?	
We need interpreters. Who would interpret for parents' evenings and the annual review of my child's statement and who is responsible for organising this?	

Are the following based on site? If not, how often do they visit school?

	Based on site	Visit how often?
Speech and language therapist		
Audiologist		
Educational audiologist		
Audiological technician		
Educational psychologist		
Occupational therapist		
Physiotherapist		
Qualified Teacher of the Deaf (ToD)		
Deaf/disabled adult role models		
Careers adviser		

Residential schools

School's statement of purpose

Go to the school's website and look for their 'statement of purpose'. This is a very useful document that goes into detail about the residential provision they offer. A child-friendly version should also be available. If you can't find a copy contact the school and ask for one to be sent to you.

National minimum standards

Schools providing residential placements for deaf children must meet national standards which promote and safeguard the welfare of children with a range of needs. These standards help schools and their staff, parents and children understand what must be offered to children in residence and are used by inspectors to independently inspect the school.

Schools must also meet the statutory regulations which are relevant to the activities they carry out. For example, residential schools in the UK providing frequent overnight accommodation for children must register as children's homes and must meet the relevant regulations and standards.

A link to national minimum standards that residential special schools must meet in all the UK countries is provided at the end of this factsheet.

Using the national minimum standards and statement of purpose we have suggested some key questions for you to ask the school about their arrangements, to make sure that your child's welfare is promoted and they are kept safe from harm. Not only can these questions help you to choose a school, they can also be used to help you ask questions about your child's ongoing care at their school or in any reviews of their care (sometimes called a 'looked-after review').

Useful questions to ask the school about their residential care

General information	
How many children stay in residence?	
How often could my child come home?	
Are rooms single or shared?	
Are toilet and bathing facilities shared or en suite?	
Could my child bring their personal belongings?	
What social activities are there for children staying in residence during the week and weekend?	
Daily routines	

What time would my child be in bed and what time is lights out?	
What supervision is provided through the night?	
What time are children allowed to wake up/leave their room?	
Can children lie in at weekend?	
Listening to my child's views	
Would my child have a named keyworker in residence?	
What pastoral support would be offered if my child was in residence?	
Is there an independent person available for my child to contact about any concerns?	
Are there house or residence meetings for children to give their views?	
Is the residence routinely inspected by school governors?	
Care staff (staff working in the residential care part of the school)	
What qualifications are required by care staff?	
Are care staff qualified first-aiders?	
What communication qualifications do care staff have e.g. British Sign Language (BSL)?	
What training do care staff receive and how often? Does this also apply to any agency staff if used?	
Does the school have a minimum staff-to-children ratio?	
Does the school carry out criminal record checks on all care staff (including agency staff) before they are employed? How often are these re-checked?	
Does the school ever use agency staff?	

Joined up care	
Are there clear arrangements in place to make sure that the school and the residential part share information when required in a way which is in the interest of my child's welfare but respects their privacy?	
Behaviour support	
Is there an anti-bullying policy? Do care staff have training in promoting positive behaviour?	
On-site safety and security	
What safety measures are in place to secure access to the external site/residence during the evening or night?	
Are there accessible smoke alarms to make sure deaf children are alerted?	
Does the school have fire drills which children routinely take part in? How often do these take place?	
Contact and visiting	
What are the school's arrangements if I want to visit my child?	
What arrangements are in place for my child to contact our family and for us to contact our child?	
Would my child be given privacy when making routine calls to us/friends?	

Using computers/social media	
<p>Would my child have access to a computer?</p> <p>If so, what measures are in place to make sure my child is safe online?</p>	
Child protection	
<p>Does the school have clear procedures in place if staff believe my child is suffering harm or is at risk of suffering harm? Do they have a written copy they can provide?</p>	
Developing independence	
<p>Does the school encourage children to develop their independence, decision making and staying safe whilst staying in residence? If yes, how do they do this?</p>	
<p>Would my child have access to private space to be able to be on his/her own?</p>	
<p>Is important signage in residence shown in BSL or other formats to aid communication?</p>	
Dietary/cultural/religious needs	

What we liked and didn't like about the school and staff

Appendix : School inspections (for all schools including residential schools)

There are different independent inspectorates for the UK countries (listed in the links at the end of this factsheet). Inspections are carried out at set intervals but these vary across the countries. Inspections can be announced or unannounced. Residential schools are usually inspected at more frequent intervals.

In England, residential schools will be inspected for their education and residential care provision at the same time.

In other parts of the UK, there are separate inspectorates for education provision and residential care provision. In these parts of the UK, where schools offer residential provision they usually have to register as children's homes because of the number of nights in a year they offer care – and therefore fall within different regulations and a different inspectorate. Often the two inspectorates will coordinate their inspections at the same time and sometimes combine these into a single report covering education and care.

Evidence gathering for inspections

The school should notify parents of inspections and send out confidential questionnaires to support the inspection. These questionnaires are sent back directly to the inspection team and are not seen by the school.

During the inspection inspectors will speak to children and staff, look at pupil records, and observe lessons, mealtimes and routines. If the school is a residential school inspectors will also check the accommodation and speak to other outside professionals such as social workers working with children who attend the school.

If the school is attended by a number of deaf children who communicate in sign language, inspectors should bring a registered independent interpreter so they can communicate with any children or staff whose first language is sign language. We would be extremely concerned if inspectors were to use school or residential staff as interpreters during inspections. Children's comments to inspectors remain anonymous unless there are safeguarding concerns where inspectors have a duty to inform the relevant designated person.

Overall findings of inspection reports

Inspectorates use different frameworks across the UK to inform their overall judgement of the quality and standard of education and care provided at schools. All will use the evidence from

inspection visits and parental questionnaires combined with how far the school is complying with legislation, regulations and national minimum standards.

Grading of all inspection reports

In England, schools are given an overall rating of both their education and residential provision and then separate ratings on the different areas that inspections are required to focus on. The ratings used are: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there is no grading system but the report will make comments and judge on various aspects of the education and care provided.

What if an inspection of a residential school finds there are failings to some of the provision of education or care?

The inspectors' actions will depend on which standards or statutory regulations have not been met, combined with a judgement about the risks these may have to children attending the school.

Inspectorates can enforce action to address any concerns they identify. This can vary from recommendations to make improvements, to requiring the school to produce an immediate action plan with clear timescales which the school must publish and share with parents. Inspectors will then usually carry out an unannounced visit within a shorter time period to make sure the necessary changes have been put in place or are being addressed.

In the most extreme cases, schools could have their education or care temporarily closed, have their registration cancelled, or steps might be taken to prosecute the registered manager or school head.

Further information about inspections

School inspection reports

Below are the links to inspection reports on schools which don't have a residential care provision. Type in the name of the school you're interested in.

England

reports.ofsted.gov.uk

Scotland

education.gov.scot/inspection-reports

Wales

www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection

Northern Ireland

www.etini.gov.uk/publications/type/inspectionreports

Residential school inspection reports

Inspection reports for residential schools should be available on request from the school or from the school's website. You can also access current and past school reports via the inspectorate's website using the below links.

England
reports.ofsted.gov.uk

Scotland
www.careinspectorate.com

Wales
careinspectorate.wales

There are no residential special schools in Northern Ireland.

The links below provide more information about how residential schools are inspected.

England
www.gov.uk/guidance/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-boarding-schools

Scotland
education.gov.scot/what-we-do/inspection-and-review/about-inspections-and-reviews

Wales
careinspectorate.wales/?lang=en

National minimum standards

The below links provide more information about the standards in place for residential schools.

England
www.gov.uk/government/publications/residential-special-schools-national-minimum-standards

Scotland
www2.gov.scot/Publications/2011/05/16143556/1

Wales
careinspectorate.wales/?lang=en

This information can be requested in large print or as a text file.
© The National Deaf Children's Society December 2016

For resource references or to give us your feedback email
informationteam@ndcs.org.uk or visit
www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/informationfeedback

The National Deaf Children's Society is a registered charity in
England and Wales no. 1016532 and in Scotland no. SC040779.