

Starting secondary school

When can your child start a [state-maintained school](#)?

Your choices:

- to apply for a place to start secondary school in the September of the school year in which he reaches the age of 12.
- to apply for a place to start middle school if that provision is available locally. These schools take children from 8-12 or 9-13, in some local authorities, after which the pupils go on to upper school at the age of 12 or 13.

When can your child start an [independent school](#)?

Independent schools offer entry at 11 in some cases or at 13 for the major public schools. Many independent schools have tests, interviews and assessments that can be very stressful for all pupils so when your child stammers it is important to try to reduce any worries he may have. Advice from a speech and language therapist could be very helpful and information and support is available from the [BSA:Helpline](#).

Your child's therapist should also be informed about your final choice of school and may be able to provide information and/or advice that you can pass on to staff there. [BSA:Education](#) provides training for secondary teachers to support children who stammer and can be accessed by your child's teachers.

[Home education](#)

Children of secondary school age, who have been home educated since they were 5, are likely to be ready to continue with home learning but for a child who has been attending a primary school the transition to home schooling can be more difficult. Parents need to take advice from the local authority and any professionals involved with the child, such as the therapist, and **ensure that the child himself supports the decision.**

If you wish to educate him at home for his secondary education you must contact your local authority 18 months before he would start to inform the education officer, with responsibility for home schooling, of your intentions. Then you will need to follow the advice supplied to ensure that you are complying with the law.

Your child's therapist should also be informed and may be able to provide you with information and/or advice. [BSA:Education](#) provides training for secondary teachers to support children who stammer and you may find some of these simple strategies useful, when you are working with your child.

School leaving date

This is currently set at the last Friday in June in the school year in which the pupil reaches the age of 16. Until that date parents must ensure their child's participation in education in school or otherwise. Employers may not employ a child full-time and training providers may not provide full-time Government sponsored training. Of course this may be reviewed and parents will receive the current information on this from their child's school or the local authority.

Some pupils will continue their education at their secondary school for the two years of the Sixth Form, or may choose other options such as a sixth form college, a further education college, or employment.

Step 1: How do I decide between schools?

Do staff need to know about stammering in my chosen school?

Is my choice of school limited when my child stammers?

NO

While it is helpful if your selected schools have some experience or knowledge of stammering, you do not need to restrict your choice of school in any way when your child stammers, as all teachers (and home educators) can learn the very simple strategies to support your child. Speech and language therapists often provide information or training for staff and specific strategies of support for class teachers are available at [BSA:Education](#).

Planning ahead for secondary education

It is advisable to start thinking about your choice of secondary school at least 18 months before your child would start. You should consider all the [options in secondary education](#) available to you before making a list of possible schools for your child.

Follow steps 1 to 4 to make your final choice of school(s) to apply for. You may apply for more than one state school and as many independent schools as you choose.

Step 1

Start with your child and start early

Remember that children who stammer generally have no other learning difficulties. They have the same range of academic abilities and personal qualities as children who do not stammer so that you should base your choice of school on your own child's academic, social and personal needs. You can then discuss the issue of your child's speech needs with the school that your child will attend. Every school should be able to adopt the simple strategies that support a child who stammers and there is considerable training available for staff on children's speech, language and communication needs now, so do not worry if your selected school does not appear to have experience of children who stammer.

It is important that your first thoughts are about your child

Talk to your child about what is important to him. As he probably goes to a primary school find out what is most important to him about his routines there. Are there any special things that your child wants?

Does he want a local school because his friends are going there? Children who stammer have the same ability and personality profile as those who do not, but may be rather sensitive to changes of location, teachers and children. You need to work out whether your child would be most helped by a smaller school, with many children he already knows, or a larger one where he may know fewer children but the facilities seem better. Different types of organisation will appeal to different children. Some secondary school parents have told the BSA that their child enjoys going to a large secondary campus where there are excellent facilities and they can more easily follow up their interests. Other parents have said that their child is happily placed in a small secondary school.

Now what is important to you?

All parents want their children to be happy at school. Try to look at all parts of school life. Are there any special things that your child needs? Make a list of the things that you and your child are looking for in a school. Put them in order of importance. Include opportunities to pursue interests like sport and music, the family need for out of hours care and holiday clubs for example. You may wish to include a faith school or an academy as well as other state schools in your list of possible choices. You can apply for more than one school.

Step 2: Judging for yourself

Below are some common reasons often given by parents for wanting a school and why it is important for your child that you get the whole picture:

'Everyone says it is a good school.' Schools can get good and bad reputations unfairly and can change very quickly with changes in head or staff. What suits one parent of the school may not suit another.

'It had an excellent OFSTED Report.' The reports are important as a guide but they can become very quickly out of date as changes of staff, particularly that of the Headteacher, can significantly alter the performance of a school. You may note particularly the inspectors' views on how well the school supports children with individual needs, what emphasis is laid on speech, language and communication needs, and how pupils behave towards each other, as bullying is inevitably a concern when your child stammers.

'It does well in the league tables.' There are different views on the usefulness of these and the Headteachers' associations are concerned that parents should not rely on them, as there have been mistakes in assessment of children in national tests (SATS) and in recording information provided on achievement of pupils at 16 and 18 plus.

What are the league tables?

In these, secondary schools, state and independent are ranked by the percentage of pupils gaining at least five A* to C grades, including the key subjects of English and Mathematics. The tables also show the percentage of pupils at each school gaining at least five A* to C grades in any subject. The Tables list GCSEs and equivalent vocational exams taken at the same age, such as GNVQs, diplomas and BTECs.

In addition, the tables show the percentage of pupils making the necessary 'progress' between the age of 11 and 16 in English and Maths. At the end of primary school, pupils are expected to gain at least 'Level 4' in SATs tests and should gain at least a C in GCSEs at the end of secondary school. Those gaining a lower Level 3 in SATs should gain at least a D at GCSE. Pupils with a higher Level 5 in SATs should gain at least a B at GCSE.

State schools - the tables also show the 'contextual value-added' score. This shows the progress pupils make between the age of 11 and 16. It also takes account of other factors, such as pupils speaking English as a second language, children with special needs and those eligible for free meals. Roughly speaking, schools with scores higher than 1000 are performing above average, below 1000 is considered below average.

Independent schools - the tables for these can be misleading as they do not show the International GCSE, which is favoured in many schools. A highly academic and achieving school can feature badly in these tables if they take high numbers of IGCSEs, particularly in English and Maths.

'It has a uniform so the discipline must be good.' Uniforms and discipline don't always go together. Remember 'good discipline' means different things to different people.

'It is brand new and has lovely grounds.' Worn but well-loved older buildings can be just as welcoming. It's important to check if the building is well cared for, whatever its age, and can offer the facilities to support the curriculum, such as good Science and Technology specialist provision.

Step 3: Collect information about possible school choices

State schools - Check the local authority guides first. Then ask all the schools you are interested in, for their information. If a school is in another education authority's area, your own local authority should be able to tell you how to contact them. It should also tell you if a school received more applications than it

had places last year. Schools must have a guide too - often called the school prospectus - to give to interested parents. By law this must include information about admission of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Check [schools finder](#) for profiles on all schools in England. These include tables of pupils' achievement at each individual school. If you don't have Internet access or the profile is missing, ask the school for a hard copy of the information.

Independent schools - you can find out more about individual schools at the [Independent Schools Directory UK](#). Then you should contact the individual school.

General Policies

Each school profile also contains the following and most independent schools do observe similar good practice - the school's successes, details of extra-curricular activities, health and safety information. You can also study other documents available from the school. There must be: Home-School Agreement, Inspectors' ([OFSTED](#)) Reports written on the school, Accessibility Plan, Sex Education Policy, Race Equality Policy, Performance (league) Tables, Work schemes and syllabuses, Religious Education Syllabus.

Specific policies that may affect your child who stammers

Special Educational Needs Policy

This explains how the school carries out the guidance of the [Special Educational Needs Code of Practice \(SEN Code\)](#), in which the Government states how resources can be allocated to meet a child's individual need. Occasionally the SEN policy may actually specify that support must be given for communication needs as the Government is committed to training school staff in these, including stammering. If you read that in an SEN policy it will be a good sign of the school's commitment to the speech needs of your child.

Enrichment policy

Schools are expected to meet the individual needs of all pupils, including those who are identified as gifted and/or talented. A separate policy explaining this provision shows that there is a real effort to meet all individual needs.

Behaviour Policy

The behaviour policy should mention bullying and include racial and sexual harassment. Most schools will have a separate anti-bullying policy and that is to be preferred as it indicates that bullying is considered specifically to be a serious issue.

Support for your child's stammer

While it is helpful if your selected schools have some experience or knowledge of stammering, you do not need to restrict your choice of school in any way when your child stammers. All teachers (and home educators) can learn the very simple strategies to support your child. Speech and language therapists often provide information or training for staff and specific strategies of support for class teachers are available at [BSA:Education](#).

Make a list of the schools that you are considering

List the good points for each school and list any not-so-good points. Are there any points you need to look out for when you visit the school? Are there any questions you would like to ask? **Write them down now.**

Step 4: Visit the schools you are considering and get the whole picture

Attend Open Evenings and arrange a visit to the schools you are considering: try to visit during a normal school day. These visits are usually held in the summer or autumn terms just before applications are completed. You can find out about them by contacting the school directly or you may see an insert in the local press.

You may wish to consider taking your child on a school visit or to an Open Evening, this is a decision that only you can make as children will vary in their reaction to this. A child who stammers who may worry about changes may benefit from being involved, particularly if he has never been in a secondary school before.

Some ideas to explore with staff on your visit to the school

Many things go together to make a good school with happy pupils. High staff turnover may mean the school is unsettled. Very low turnover may mean the staff are happy but the school could be set in its ways. Small things such as friends being put in the same class can make a big difference to children. Good leadership generally means a good school.

Are the new intake given the opportunity to take part in an induction programme before the school term starts in September? Does the school organisation offer support to the individual pupil? Is there a pastoral system whereby a tutor has responsibility for a form group, with support from a Head of House or Year, so that even when the school is very large your child is known well by a number of colleagues? Can parents meet with the staff likely to be most involved with their child, such as the form tutor and the Head of Year before their child starts?

Does the curriculum appear to be well supported by the school provision - Science laboratories, specialist subject rooms, and Sports and Performing Arts facilities? Are these well maintained even if the building is old? Exercise is important for all children but are less 'sporty' children encouraged? Is there opportunity for pupils to take part in performances and would your child be encouraged to do this if he wished, even when stammering?

Some parents and education experts have different views about education. Teaching children in mixed ability classes is common in state secondary schools in Year 7 with setting by ability introduced at some point for academic subjects. Independent schools often set by ability from the start. Academic selection and the value of homework are all issues that people feel strongly about. Most schools will have a clear homework timetable appropriate for each year group.

Is the school inclusive - is there evidence as you go round of an appreciation of diversity with books and work sheets that are non-sexist and non-racist? Would the school be prepared to include a reading book for pupils that had a character who stammered if you recommended it for the library? Is this important to you?

Are social times/breaks seen positively? Is there a range of activities going on or does one activity dominate? Have supervisors had training, particularly in managing episodes of teasing and bullying? Is there an opportunity for lower school pupils to stay in their own social areas as many of them may find the older pupils' presence intimidating? Does the school offer an extended day e.g. an after-school club? How are children's views taken into account? Is there a school council?

Schools can have healthy eating policies - has this school one? Does the food in the dining room look fresh and appetising? Do many pupils leave the premises at lunchtime, if so are there any concerns locally about their behaviour?

Do parents have any say in how the school is run? What does the school do to involve and inform parents? How does the school report to parents?

Use your eyes and ears. Is the school inclusive, welcoming and well cared for? Do staff and pupils seem happy? Evidence of an exciting approach to learning should be clear as you go into classrooms, look for

effective displays of pupils' work and that indefinable sense of quiet purpose and co-operation that will provide an environment which is encouraging and yet offers challenge. Notice how staff speak to pupils during lessons, do the pupils seem attentive and responsive; do staff listen with interest to their answers? Are senior pupils encouraged to give support to the younger ones, through a buddy system for instance, particularly when they first start?

Are you encouraged to see the whole school? Check the library. Is it well used and has a wide range of books? Are the cloakrooms and toilets clean and well maintained? Check the walls and notice boards, particularly those in corridors. Try to see the movement of pupils down corridors at the end of a lesson, is it orderly? Is pupils' work on display? Are there notices for parents? Check the school gate and the playground. Don't be put off by large groups of older pupils as long as they are behaving - remember your child will be one soon!

Is there a cloakroom or lockers available so that heavy bags do not need to be carried around all day by pupils? Note how secure the building is as you arrive and leave, you should be reassured by the entry procedures.

Support for your child's stammer

You need to discover when visiting the school exactly how staff will offer support for your child's speech. The best teacher to meet with about this is the teacher responsible for special educational needs (SENCO). Discuss the support for your child's speech. Ask about the staff's experience/knowledge/training in stammering, links with therapists and whether there will be a key staff member, such as the form tutor, to whom you can communicate your worries and who will contact you. If the school has a child who stammers on the roll you could ask if those parents could be contacted to give permission for you to talk with them about the support their child has received. Check if your child will be able to go to a particular adult if there is a problem: in secondary schools this is likely to be the form tutor or the Head of Year or possibly a classroom assistant. Many schools have home-partnership agreements and you should enquire about this.

You should be given the opportunity to meet with the staff that will have the pastoral responsibility for your child before he starts at the school. Most schools provide this by arranging a special evening for new parents and you can take this opportunity to emphasise again the speech needs of your child and make sure that the form tutor or an appropriate colleague is able to offer support to your child when he needs it.

Children who stammer need to feel safe from bullying, and to be supported by staff and pupils so that their achievements are appreciated. Enquire about the policy on bullying and how it is dealt with. Make sure you are happy with the approach adopted. Look for evidence of the recognition of achievement in wall displays and for a sense of inclusion.

If staff have no knowledge of stammering there is no need to be alarmed. You should discuss with them how they could access this information from the therapist, and the [BSA](#). Simple strategies to meet your child's needs in the classroom are available at [BSA:Education](#)

Add any points you think important to your list. Then draw up your final list of schools for your application form(s).

Step 5: Application

Step 5: Application: State-schools - contact the local authority

You would be advised to keep file copies of all the documents connected with your application. You will need them if you wish to appeal against the decision of the local authority.

[Directgov](#) provides comprehensive information on the whole process of applying to state schools

The local authority manages admissions and sets the dates for the process: usually from September the year before admission. The admissions authority for a school may be the local authority or the Governing Body of the school. However the admissions arrangements are set by law to ensure fairness. Parents usually choose three preferred schools on the application form. An additional form is often required by church schools about religious observance. When there is a place available in a chosen school it must be offered to parents but it is important to express a preference on the form because if there are more applications than places available, preferences will be taken into account.

Admissions criteria

When your child stammers It's very important to find out what admissions criteria schools use before you choose which schools to apply to, so that you can see if they match your child's situation. Details of admissions criteria, along with figures showing the number of applications schools received the previous year, are listed in school prospectuses. This information is also available in the 'Information for Parents' booklet produced by your local authority.

Some common admissions criteria

- Social and medical need

This criteria may be helpful for a child who stammers and provides an opportunity for you to provide information about the effects of stammering on your child and your reasons for choosing a particular school. **If your child has been placed on 'School Action' or 'School Action Plus' at primary school, there is clear evidence that the stammer has been acknowledged as causing difficulties.**

- your child has a brother or sister who will be at the school when they start there
- for religious or faith schools, your child or family is of the particular religion or faith served by the school
- if your child attends a linked primary school

If your child is in line for more than one of your chosen schools, you will be offered a place at the school you ranked highest on the application. If none of your chosen schools can offer your child a place because other applicants met the criteria more closely, your local authority will offer you a place at another school.

What if my child has complex needs?

When your child has complex needs you must talk to your local authority and your child's doctor about what sort of school would be best. In some cases the local authority will need to assess your child's educational needs. If they decide your child needs specialist help, they will make an assessment and may write a Statement of Special Educational Needs, naming a school. This means that a state school that is named **must** give your child a place.

Completing your application form

Once you have decided which schools are right for your child, you need to get an application pack from the local authority. Complete the application form in the pack or submit your application online. There is always a section for reasons for your choice of school, and for stating whether the child is on the SEN register. If your child stammers and you believe that the stammer does affect learning then he should be on this register at 'School Action' or 'School Action Plus' if he is receiving therapy.

If you wish to say on the application that the school you prefer is particularly appropriate for the support it can give your child who stammers, then it is helpful to have already established that your child's speech needs have been supported by the SEN Code of Practice through 'School Action' or 'School Action Plus'. Also, the [BSA](http://www.stammering.org/) can provide information about the effects of

stammering on children to support your application. Your child's speech and language therapist may be prepared to supply personal details of your child's needs as well. However, this is not permitted by all therapy services, as the service may not wish to appear to be supporting one local school over another.

Important dates

Most local authorities set a deadline for applications in the November or December before your child starts secondary school in the following September.

The results of your application

The local authority will post you a letter with details of the school place offered to your child on 1 March (or the next working day), or let you know by email if you have applied online and have asked them to do so.

Appeals: If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your application, you have the right to appeal to an independent appeal panel. The information on this process will be provided to you when the local authority advises you that your child has not been offered a place in your preferred school(s).

Application - Independent schools

These require an individual application to the school. Each school will follow its own procedures for application, deadlines and Appeal. Sometimes parents apply for both state and independent schools at the same time. Remember that when your child stammers he may be more likely to find all the processes connected with school transfer very stressful, particularly if he is having to visit a number of schools and perhaps also take tests for entry to independent schools. It is important that he feels supported by the family and advice from a speech and language therapist could be very helpful.

When your child starts at the new school

There will be an opportunity for your child to visit the school before starting and you will be invited in as well to meet teachers. Ask particularly to meet your child's form tutor in the secondary school, and the teacher responsible for special educational needs to discuss the support for your child's speech. You may also find that your child's speech and language therapist is prepared to visit a state school to discuss your child's speech needs. In the case of an independent school, this is a matter for the local service to decide upon, according to their protocols.

Parents tell the BSA that they have to frequently remind staff if there is a change of teacher that their child stammers. Do be prepared to keep close contact with the school and to pass on any concerns to the form tutor or other appropriate colleague, such as the Head of Year or House, sooner rather than later, so problems may be nipped in the bud. Information for teachers and parents on stammering is always available from the [BSA](#) and its training resource for secondary staff at [BSA:Education](#).

Summary

Do staff need to know about stammering in my chosen school?

Is my choice of school limited when my child stammers?

NO

While it is helpful if your selected schools have some experience or knowledge of stammering, you do not need to restrict your choice of school in any way when your child stammers, as all teachers (and home educators) can learn the very simple strategies to support your child. Speech and language

therapists often provide information or training for staff and specific strategies of support for class teachers are available at [BSA:Education](#).

When can your child start a [state-maintained school](#)?

Your choices:

- to apply for a place to start secondary school in the September of the school year in which he reaches the age of 12.
- to apply for a place to start middle school if that provision is available locally. These schools take children from 8-12 or 9-13, in some local authorities, after which the pupils go on to upper school at the age of 12 or 13.

When can your child start an [independent school](#)?

Independent schools offer entry at 11 in some cases or at 13 for the major public schools. **Many independent schools have tests, interviews and assessments that can be very stressful for all pupils so when your child stammers it is important to try to reduce any worries he may have. Advice from a speech and language therapist could be very helpful and information and support is available from the [BSA:Helpline](#).**

Your child's therapist should also be informed about your final choice of school and may be able to provide information and/or advice that you can pass on to staff there. [BSA:Education](#) provides training for secondary teachers to support children who stammer and can be accessed by your child's teachers.

[Home education](#)

Children of secondary school age, who have been home educated since they were 5, are likely to be ready to continue with home learning but for a child who has been attending a primary school the transition to home schooling can be more difficult. Parents need to take advice from the local authority and any professionals involved with the child, such as the therapist, and **ensure that the child himself supports the decision.**

School leaving date

This is currently set at the last Friday in June in the school year in which the pupil reaches the age of 16. Some pupils will continue their education at their secondary school for the two years of the Sixth Form, or may choose other options such as a sixth form college, a further education college, or employment.