



RUNNYMEDE

FOUNDATION

PRE-SCHOOL TO RECEPTION
AGE 3 TO 5

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TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO KNOW

HELPING BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC, REFUGEE,
ASYLUM-SEEKING AND TRAVELLER PARENTS
TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN IN EDUCATION

• INTRODUCTION

The Runnymede Trust designed *Tell Me What I Need to Know* to help parents, particularly those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Refugee, Asylum-seeking and Traveller communities to support their children's education more confidently and effectively.

Although the information and guidance that we provide will be relevant for parents from all backgrounds, we concentrated on these groups because statistics repeatedly show that, while some children from these groups do extremely well, many others fail to achieve their potential. There are a number of reasons for this, but it is clear that if parents do get involved in their children's learning, both in school and at home, that can make a difference. As our research shows, there is, too, no question that parents in our target group care and want to achieve the best for their children.

In the summer of 2006 we carried out an online survey. Over 200 parents and teachers responded. 88% of the parents felt that it is very important to support and be involved in their children's education. But both parents and teachers told us about their concerns and the barriers to involvement that they experienced. We have also looked at existing research on parental involvement and, although BME parents reflect many of the same concerns as other parents, there are particular factors that affect them more.

One concern consistently repeated by parents is that they don't have enough information: they don't understand how the education system works and don't know their rights. It is clear, too, that there are areas of misunderstanding, mistrust, sensitivity and lack of communication on the part of both parents and schools. Also evident, though, are signs that government, local authorities, schools, teachers, independent agencies as well as parents are searching for – and finding – creative solutions to the perceived problems.

Tell Me What I Need to Know attempts to address the concerns of parents and teachers and to bring together strategies to overcome the hurdles. Examples of 'good practice' are drawn from across

the country. Since parents are often in the best position to identify and understand their children's needs, we hope that this information will give them increased confidence to engage more effectively with their children's schools.

We have restricted *Tell Me What I Need to Know* to the education system in England and to the period when a child's formal education begins at the age of 3 until compulsory education comes to an end. The education system is constantly changing and complex. There is a lot that parents need to understand, particularly those parents who have not been through the system themselves. We have therefore divided the information part of *Tell Me What I Need to Know* into 4 booklets, covering the Key Stages of a child's education. Each booklet gives you the information you need to understand what happens in your child's school as well as guidance and suggestions to help you prepare for the next Key Stage.

This booklet concentrates on the Foundation Stage, from age 3 to 5. Other booklets cover:

Key Stages 1&2	Age 5-11
Key Stage 3	Age 11-14
Key Stage 4	Age 14-17
Good Practice	

There is a great deal of information in this booklet, but you do not need to read it in one session. You can scan through the headings and decide which parts you need to know about now. You could then come back to other subjects at another time. If you have younger or older children, you might want to read about one of the other Key Stages.

Throughout this booklet, we've used the term 'parent' to include anyone who has responsibility for the care of a child.

The booklet called 'Good Practice' brings together the creative ways in which parents' concerns are being addressed and we have also offered suggestions about how parents can, themselves, try to overcome barriers. We hope that this booklet, in particular, will help parents and teachers to work in partnership as co-educators of our children.



- FOUNDATION STAGE
- PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION
- CHOOSING FROM THE CHILDCARE ON OFFER

FOUNDATION STAGE PRE-SCHOOL TO RECEPTION AGE 3 TO 5

All 3- and 4-year-olds can get 12.5 hours of free early education a week (2.5 hours a day, 5 days a week), 38 weeks a year from the 1 September, 1 January or 1 April after their 3rd birthday. By 2010, this will increase to 15 hours a week. This free provision must be with a registered childcare provider. In addition, parents will have the flexibility to use the free entitlement across a minimum of 3 days so that the 15 hours could, for example, be used over 3 days rather than 5.

The government planned that by 2008 there would be at least 1,000 primary schools that open from 8.00am to 6.00pm up to 48 weeks a year. By 2010, schools will open from 8.00am to 6.00pm and you will have access to an out-of-school childcare place for children aged 3-14 every Monday to Friday, all year round.

WHAT KIND OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IS THERE?

You can make a number of different choices for children who are over 3 years old. There is a range of registered childcare providers:

Nursery schools may be private or state-funded. State-funded nursery schools must have at least 1 qualified teacher for every 20 children.

Nursery classes in state-funded primary schools usually offer 5 half-day sessions a week. There has to be at least 1 qualified teacher and 1 qualified nursery assistant for every 26 children.

Day nurseries can be run by local authorities, voluntary or community organisations, private companies or employers. Privately-run day nurseries usually offer full-time care and some are open in school holidays. There has to be at least 1 adult for every 8 children and at least half the staff must have a qualification recognised by the local authority.

Pre-school playgroups are often run by community or church groups or volunteers. They usually offer half-day sessions. There has to be 1 adult for every

8 children and at least half of the adults must be qualified leaders or assistants.

Accredited childminders may work as part of a network that offers pre-school education. Since they need to be registered, they are inspected regularly by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Sure Start Children's Centres can provide early education and full daycare for children under 5. They are open a minimum of 10 hours a day, 5 days a week, 48 weeks a year.

Reception classes are offered by some state-funded primary schools. Some take children for half-days at first, building up to full-time attendance. By law, there can be no more than 30 children in the class. Most have assistants as well as qualified teachers.

CHOOSING FROM THE CHILDCARE ON OFFER

Your local **Children's Information Service** (0800 960 996) will have details of registered pre-school providers.

OFSTED registers and inspects childcare providers. You can look at the reports at www.ofsted.gov.uk. It's also worth talking to other parents you know or might have met in parents' groups. They might already have experience of pre-school facilities in your area and can often give personal recommendations.

Local Sure Start centres may have bilingual workers who can visit you in your own home to help you work out what you and your child need in terms of childcare.

From 2008 if you have a child under 15 (17 if your child is disabled), you will be able to get help finding childcare so that you can work. Local authorities will be responsible for making childcare available to parents who need it.

How do I decide?

You know your child best so you'll know what suits his/her personality and what works for your own circumstances.



- WHO'S WHO IN PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY
- WHAT HAPPENS IN PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?
- WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

It's a good idea to visit potential pre-school providers. Do this at a time when children are being looked after. This will give you a good idea of what the facilities are, what activities take place, how engaged and positive the children seem, what kind of stimulation there is for them in terms of books and games etc., what they eat and what you'll have to pay, if anything. If you take your child with you, you'll get an idea of how he/she is likely to fit in and how he/she reacts to the staff, surroundings and other children. Check the facilities for outdoor play to see how safe and secure they are. Go back for another visit if you need to. You might find that a combination of options suits you best.

WHO'S WHO IN MY CHILD'S PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?

Some childcare facilities are staffed by volunteers, possibly including parents. Nursery schools are likely to have a principal or head teacher, teachers, nursery assistants, classroom assistants as well as administrative staff such as a secretary, administrator, and buildings supervisor. Nursery schools also have a SENCO (Special Needs Co-ordinator) who is responsible for co-ordinating help for children with special educational needs.

WHAT HAPPENS IN PRE-SCHOOL/ NURSERY?

The pre-school/nursery year

Some providers offer half-day sessions for a number of weeks in the year. State-funded nursery classes and schools are likely to be closed for school holidays. They may also have staff training – or 'inset' – days when teachers need to be in school but children do not. You may therefore need to look for other care for those times. Private day nurseries may offer full-time care throughout the year.

Meals

School meals have recently been in the news and schools now try to make sure that children can get a healthy meal at lunchtime. If your child will be attending full-time, you may want to discuss with staff the types of menus available and whether they are suitable for your religious or cultural needs. Some parents give their children a packed lunch.

Uniform

Some nurseries – though by no means all – have a uniform for daily wear.

Behaviour and Discipline

You may think that discipline will not be an issue at this age but even young children may have behavioural problems that affect other children. They are still learning to interact with others, so they may not have learned boundaries. Staff will be experienced in dealing with hitting, biting or temper tantrums. When you choose a nursery or childcare, you need to ask about how discipline is handled. What kinds of issues arise and how are they dealt with? Who is responsible for behaviour and how will any difficulties be communicated to you?

Physical punishment is not allowed.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

The Foundation Stage is what the government calls a child's educational stage from age 3 to the end of Reception Class (the first stage of primary school). The education covers 6 areas:

Personal, social and emotional development

– including learning to be self-confident, to take an interest in things, to tell the difference between right and wrong and to be able to dress, and undress, themselves.

Communication, language and literacy

– talking clearly and confidently, enjoying stories, songs and poems, hearing and saying sounds and linking them to the alphabet, learning to use a pencil.

Mathematical development

– developing an understanding of maths through stories, songs, games and imaginative play; becoming confident with numbers and with ideas like 'heavier than' or 'bigger than'; gaining an awareness of shapes and space.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

– exploring and finding out about the world and asking questions about it; building with different materials and knowing about everyday technology such as batteries, magnets and lamps and what they



- RACE AND CULTURE
- HOW WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?
- HOW IS MY CHILD DOING?

are used for; finding out about past events in their own lives and their families' lives; learning about different cultures and beliefs.

Physical development

– learning to move confidently; controlling their body and handling equipment.

Creative development

– exploring colours and shapes; learning to dance; creating artwork; telling stories and making music.

There are targets for each of these areas. It may seem as if your child is too young to be faced with all this, but most of the learning will be done through structured play and should be appropriate for your child's age and development.

RACE AND CULTURE

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 says that public bodies (including state-funded pre-school facilities and nurseries) must have 'due regard to the need':

- to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination; and
- to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

This applies to admission, assessment, raising pupils' attainment levels, delivering the curriculum, discipline, guidance and support. Providers can't claim that they don't have the resources to meet these responsibilities.

This means that state-maintained schools need to make sure that they don't discriminate against you or your child because of your background and they must respect your culture. Under the law, Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish Heritage are recognised ethnic groups.

Many pre-schools and nurseries celebrate Black History Month in October of each year as well as religious festivals like Diwali, Eidh, Ramadhan, Guru Nanak's birthday or the crowning of Haile Selassie.

If you feel that your culture is not respected and reflected in school life and the curriculum or toys and activities available, you can discuss this with staff,

perhaps together with other parents who feel the same way. This may be more difficult if you're part of a very small minority but pre-schools and nurseries might value your contribution since all children will benefit. Schools also now have a duty to promote community cohesion (good relations between different communities).

HOW WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

Most of your child's learning in pre-school or nursery school will be in the form of games or play, activities that are designed to be fun but also to help him/her learn to listen, concentrate and co-operate with other children. He/she will also learn specific skills like using a pencil, scissors or glue. Children also listen to stories and rhymes and talk about their own experiences. They'll learn to write their own names. They may dance and play musical instruments. They may bake, make models, grow plants or look after pets.

Some childcare providers have bilingual workers who can help children (and parents) whose first language is not English.

English as an Additional Language

Some children need to learn English as an additional language in pre-school or nursery school. They should be given extra help such as, for example, help from bilingual teaching assistants or dual-language books to read.

HOW DO I KNOW HOW MY CHILD IS DOING?

There aren't any tests at this stage but your child will be assessed at the end of the Foundation stage and what's known as the 'Foundation Stage Profile' will be drawn up. It covers all 6 areas of learning and is based on the teacher's observation of your child through the Reception year.

You can talk to staff about your child's progress and any concerns that you might have.

Communication

The pre-school or nursery might contact you by phone, text, email or letter. Some letters will be



• WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

translated if necessary. There might also be a named person who will contact you, perhaps a member of staff who is bilingual or has expertise in issues relating to Black and Minority Ethnic or Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities. You can also take the opportunity to talk to staff when you drop your child off or pick him/her up.

Some nurseries produce regular newsletters to let parents know what's going on.

WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a term that covers a number of different difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for a child to learn compared to other children of the same age. These might include difficulties with schoolwork, communication or behaviour. Help for children with special educational needs will, most often, happen within mainstream schools, sometimes with outside specialist help. The local authority has responsibility for SEN provision. The school's governing body has a duty to 'make every effort to see that the necessary special arrangements are made for any pupil who has special educational needs'. It also has to make sure that parents are told about what arrangements are being made for their child.

Most nursery schools have a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) who you can talk to about any learning difficulties that your child might have. The SENCO will be able to identify what extra resources can be provided to help.

SEN diagnosis

It's important to trust your own instincts about your child. Although he/she may not have a diagnosis, you are likely to sense if something is wrong. You can talk to your child's teacher to see if he/she shares any of your concerns. You can also talk to the SENCO in school.

Getting a statement of special educational needs

If you believe that your child's early education provider isn't able to provide the extra help that your child needs or that he/she isn't making the progress that he/she should and is falling further

behind, you can ask the local authority to carry out what's called a 'statutory assessment'. This is a detailed investigation by specialists to find out what your child's special educational needs are and what special help is required. The local authority may or may not agree to do so. If they do decide to carry out an assessment, this might result in them writing a 'statement of special educational needs' for your child. It will describe your child's special educational needs and what special help he/she requires.

Some forms of special educational need may be considered to be a disability and your child might be entitled to additional support under the **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005**.

You can read the government's *Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs*, written to ensure that children with SEN get the right help. A free copy is available from the **DCSF** publication centre on **0845 602 2260**. The DCSF also publishes *SEN: A guide for parents & carers* in a number of community languages (www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/parentcarers).

Schools must have a SEN policy and must tell parents how they can complain and how complaints will be dealt with.

If you're not satisfied with a local authority's decision about the assessment of your child's needs, you can appeal to a SEN tribunal. You can find more guidance on the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunals** website at www.sendist.gov.uk.

Getting help

It can be difficult to get a statement of special educational needs because there are limited funds available to local authorities. But if you believe that your child does require additional help, you might want to ask your GP for support and persist with the school's SENCO.

Parent Partnership services provide support and advice for parents about SEN. You can find them through your local authority. You can also get help and advice from the **Advisory Centre for Education** (**0808 800 5793**).

- OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
- WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER?

WHAT OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT THE PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY PROVIDE?

School trips

Children may go on day trips, perhaps to a local library, shop, park, farm, museum or exhibition. These trips are not compulsory but they are meant to support your child's learning and can be a great deal of fun. As a certain number of adults may be needed to accompany the children, you may be asked to go along.

You will usually be asked to sign a form giving your permission for your child to go on the trip. There may be a small cost for fares or entrance fees and you might have to provide a packed lunch.

Schools don't want children to be excluded from the learning opportunities provided by school trips, so they can sometimes offer financial assistance for parents who have difficulty meeting any costs.

WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?

Pre-school providers and nurseries have responsibilities under Health and Safety legislation to make sure that children are safe. You might want to find out how adults entering the premises are screened and what safeguards there are to prevent children leaving.

Health

Pre-school providers and nurseries should be able to provide first aid if there are minor accidents. They will normally record incidents in a book and will send a note to you at home. If an injury or illness is anything other than minor, the pre-school or nursery is likely to call you and ask you to collect your child. They may also have a child protection policy, to pick up on any signs of abuse.

If your child has a medical condition or needs to take medication regularly, you should let the staff know.

Racism

As a parent, you may be concerned about the possibility of your child having to deal with racism in

pre-school. Staff need to acknowledge that racism exists in society and it's therefore possible that it might exist even within pre-school and nursery schools. They need to confront racism wherever and whenever it appears in pre-schools or nursery schools.

Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, public bodies (including state-funded nurseries) must have 'due regard to the need':

- to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination; and
- to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Pre-schools and nurseries can't claim that they don't have the resources to meet these responsibilities.

All state-maintained schools must also produce a written statement of their policy for promoting race equality and you can ask to see it. They must also note and report racist incidents to the local authority. The race equality policy is just as important in schools with few children from Black and Minority Ethnic or Traveller families as it is in those with many. Just because there are few BME or Traveller children does not mean that racism does not exist within that school.

Independent pre-school facilities and nurseries don't have to comply with these requirements in the same way although the Commission for Racial Equality strongly encouraged them to do so. However, the Race Relations Act does require them **not** to discriminate in terms of admissions, access to benefits or services, and exclusions. If your child's pre-school or nursery is privately run, you may still want to ask if they have a race equality policy.

If you believe that your child is subject to racism in pre-school or nursery, you might first talk to the staff. If you are not happy with the results, you can discuss the matter with a governor or management committee member. If that does not help, you can take your complaint to the local authority. You can try to get help from your local Citizen's Advice Bureau or Racial Equality Council.



- DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO GO TO PRE-SCHOOL?
- WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS?
- WHAT DO I DO DURING THE HOLIDAYS?
- WHAT FINANCIAL HELP CAN I GET?
- HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO GO TO PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?

No, your child does not have to go to nursery. By law, parents have to make sure that their child is receiving suitable education by the first term after his/her 5th birthday. As nursery schools help to prepare children for primary school and the formal learning process, you'll need to think about whether a nursery might be good for your child and, perhaps, give him/her a head start.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT MY CHILD'S /PRE-SCHOOL NURSERY?

If you're not happy with the care your child receives, try talking to the carer first of all. Try to remain calm and to listen carefully to the response you receive. Take a friend with you if you need support and try to agree what action will be taken by the pre-school or nursery. If the action is not taken or doesn't solve the problem, then try talking to whoever is in charge of the pre-school or nursery. If you're not satisfied, you may want to look for alternative childcare.

If the matter is serious and you believe that the pre-school or nursery is not meeting the necessary standards, you can make a complaint directly to OFSTED's **Early Years Complaints Helpline** on [0845 601 4772](tel:0845 601 4772) and they will investigate. However, they will not usually get involved in complaints about fees and contractual arrangements.

WHAT DO I DO DURING THE HOLIDAYS?

Some childcare providers are open throughout the year; others operate only during term time so you might need to make other arrangements during holidays. You may be able to find childcare in out-of-school clubs, kids' clubs or holiday playschemes, sometimes held in schools. They might offer a variety of sports, music or arts activities. There is usually a fee to be paid. Your local **Children's Information Service** will have information about what is available locally.

Some churches, mosques, temples and community centres also organise activities during holidays.

WHAT FINANCIAL HELP CAN I GET FOR MY CHILD'S EDUCATION?

Some parents worry about the cost of formal childcare or early education for their child. Remember that all 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to free part-time education.

You may also be able to get help through the Child Tax Credit depending on your income and circumstances. The childcare part of the Working Tax Credit may pay for some of your eligible childcare costs. There is a maximum amount. You can get a claim pack by calling [0845 300 3900](tel:0845 300 3900) or you can pick one up from your local **Jobcentre Plus**. Some employers might also give tax-free vouchers to help pay for childcare.

If you are a single parent, then, under the New Deal for Lone Parents, you can get help with childcare costs while you attend appointments with your Personal Adviser, job interviews or take part in approved training or work trials. You can find out more by calling [0845 606 2626](tel:0845 606 2626) or visit the website at www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/index.html.

Local authorities have access to the Social Inclusion Fund which can help with holiday and out-of-school childcare. The fund helps those on a low income with children under 14. This includes Travellers on temporary or permanent sites and refugees and asylum seekers in their first year of settlement.

You can get more information from HM Revenue & Customs' *Help with the Costs of Childcare: Information for Parents and Childcare Providers* at www.hmrc.gov.uk/leaflets or from the orderline at [08459 000404](tel:08459 000404).

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?

If you want to get more involved, then let the staff know. They may value offers of help, any particular skills that you have, and your time.

Some pre-schools and nurseries will have regular parents' meetings and social events as well as



• HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?

children's activities to which parents are invited (the annual carol service, nativity or other play might have you shedding a few tears!).

Before OFSTED make their regular inspections, they give parents questionnaires that ask for your views on a number of questions about the nursery school or pre-school provider. This is one opportunity to give your opinions.

Home–school agreements

Nursery schools might ask you to sign a home–school agreement that sets out what they expect from you and what you can expect from them. You do not have to sign it, but it's worth reading it carefully so that you understand what the school believes are your responsibilities. Private nurseries might ask you to sign a similar contract or letter.

What can I do to help in pre-school/nursery?

You might be able to become involved with the management committee or governing body of your child's nursery. Some nurseries may also have Parent Representatives. Being a Parent Representative could be a useful way of getting to know other parents and children in the nursery as well as the staff.

You could be asked to go in to nursery to tell stories, read or cook with the children or to demonstrate any other particular skill or talent you have. Many nurseries and playgroups welcome and encourage parental involvement.

You might also be asked to contribute your time and/or skills in fund-raising projects.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE OF PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY?

You'll probably enjoy reading with your child. Most children love books and will be fascinated by colourful pictures as well as the sound of your voice. The **Bookstart** scheme (www.bookstart.co.uk) gives 3-year-olds 'My Bookstart Treasure Chest', a free pack containing books, a scribble pad and activity pad. Be warned that many children love hearing the same stories over and

over again, so you may want to include some books that you enjoy!

Perhaps you could tell your children the kinds of stories that your parents told you. They'll be particularly fascinated by the idea of grandparents telling the same stories to their parent. Or you can try making up stories together. Stories might be in English or their heritage language. Learning songs and rhymes can help children with their listening and concentration skills.

You might want to draw or paint together, or play sports. Most children enjoy playing games with their parents like simple board games or guessing games, hide-and-seek or imaginative role play (when they'll particularly enjoy telling you what to do). They'll have fun and begin to learn a number of skills from you including decision-making, accepting boundaries, negotiation and trust.

Television needn't be dismissed as there are programmes specially designed for young children that you might both enjoy watching.

Some museums and galleries organise special activities for family groups that you might all enjoy doing together.

It will probably come naturally to you to praise your child when he/she has done well, and children do respond positively. It's worth making an effort to seek out opportunities to offer praise or encouragement.

Homework

The idea of children so young being asked to do 'homework' may seem ridiculous, but some nursery schools simply ask that children choose and read one book a week at home (with parents). Children may be learning colours or numbers and they may be given simple counting or language games to play at home.

If your child is learning English, you can help by reading with them in your first language. Fluency in a child's first language will also help with English.

Cultural identity

Many parents feel that it's important that children should be encouraged to respect each other's cultural



• PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION

backgrounds in school. The fact that you maintain traditions and beliefs at home will help to strengthen your child's confidence in school. Contact with friends and family, attendance at the church, temple or mosque and talking about family history or the history of your family's country of heritage are some of the ways that children can gain a sense of their cultural identity.

Some parents feel that it's also important to seek out learning and play materials in which their children are not marginalised. Multicultural books as well as dolls and toys are available, often by mail order. You can find some suppliers in the **Real Histories Directory** at www.realhistories.org.uk.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION?

It really is never too early to think about your child's formal education. Some parents-to-be start putting their child's name on school waiting lists as soon as they know that they are expecting. Some even move home in order to secure a place in their preferred nursery or school.

If your child has been looked after at home or by family, they may need to adjust to being in an environment where there are a lot more children, older and bigger children, unfamiliar adults, and where they are not the centre of attention. If you can, try to visit primary schools to see how they are organised and how lessons are run. Will your child cope with sitting at a table with a group of other children? Do they understand that teachers have authority?

Even if your child has been to pre-school or nursery, he/she may need help to adjust to larger classes and longer days.

You can help to prepare your child for primary school by letting them know what to expect and, if you can, by arranging for them to meet other children who will be going to the same school.

Choices

The time to apply for a place at a local primary school will probably arrive sooner than you expect.

Remember that the law says that parents must make sure that their child is receiving suitable education by the first term after his/her 5th birthday. Some schools let children start full time as a 'rising 5' – at the beginning of the term in which they will have their 5th birthday. In some schools children may start part-time in Reception Class and gradually build up to full-time attendance.

Education, though, doesn't have to be in a school environment. Some parents, for many different reasons, choose **home education**. Children who are educated at home don't have to follow the National Curriculum or take national tests, but parents must make sure that the education is full time and suitable for the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special needs. You do not need to be a qualified teacher to educate your child at home. There are organisations that offer support to parents who choose this route such as **Education Otherwise**, www.education-otherwise.org/. Parents might also consider sharing home education with other like-minded parents.

If you decide to educate your child at school, in most areas, you will need to apply for school in the autumn of the year before your child starts school. It is vital that you don't miss the deadline for applying since that will make it less likely that you'll get a place in the school of your choice. You'll need to fill in an application form that you get from your local authority or you can apply online at your local authority's website.

There are a number of choices and making the decisions about your child's education can seem daunting and stressful. It will help if you start researching as early as possible.

Types of school

Most children will go to a **primary school** that covers Key Stages 1 and 2, ages 5 to 11. Some primary schools are divided into 'infant' and 'junior' schools, sometimes on different sites and sometimes with different head teachers.

In some parts of the country, there is a '**middle school**' system where there is a first school, middle school and high school. Depending on the local



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authority, children transfer from first school to middle school at age 8, 9 or even 10.

Schools are either 'state' or 'independent' (fee-paying) schools. State-funded schools must follow the National Curriculum, which specifies the subjects that are taught and, to a large extent, how they are taught.

There are different types of **state-funded school**:

Community schools are run by the local authority and are closely linked to the community in which they are based through offering childcare and/or adult learning classes. The local authority is responsible for admitting pupils.

Foundation schools are managed by a governing body (or board of governors) that sets the admissions criteria.

Voluntary-aided schools are usually funded by the local authority, but not owned by them. The governing body sets the admissions criteria.

Voluntary-controlled schools are run by the local authority, which sets admissions criteria and handles admissions.

State-funded Faith schools may be Church of England, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh or Greek Orthodox. Some faith schools teach their own faith but others teach a locally-agreed syllabus that might include a number of faiths. Admissions criteria have a belief element but some schools also reserve places for those of other and no faith.

Independent primary schools set their own admissions criteria and are not obliged to follow the National Curriculum. They are registered with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and monitored by OFSTED. They are funded by the fees that parents pay as well as income from investments. Some independent schools have scholarships or bursaries available, possibly linked to a particular subject such as music, science or art. Some independent schools take children from the age of 4. They also include:

Preparatory – or 'prep' – schools prepare pupils for fee-paying independent secondary schools. Some may be linked to one particular school. They usually take children from the age of 7 or 8, but some 'pre-

prep' schools take children at the age of 5.

Montessori schools aim to let children progress at their own pace. Teaching tends to be one to one or in small groups with nearly no whole-class lessons. Some of the goals relate to life skills, others to academic learning.

Steiner schools emphasise developing the 'whole child'. Children learn through 'hands-on' activities like gardening, woodcraft etc. as well as classroom lessons. They also teach foreign languages from an early age.

CHOOSING A PRIMARY SCHOOL

Your local authority will have a list of schools in your area although it is possible for your child to go to school outside your area. If you have access to a computer, you can also go to the **Directgov** website (<http://schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk/>) to search for schools in your area. It's useful to network as much as you can. Find out about what other parents, local newspapers, your health visitor or GP say about local schools. Get hold of the last OFSTED report (www.ofsted.gov.uk) and the achievement and attainment tables (often called 'league tables') produced by the DCSF (www.dfes.gov.uk/performance/tables). You can read school prospectuses in libraries or ask schools to send them to you. Do you and your child want a single-sex school? How important is your faith to you both? These are questions that will help you to decide.

Visit the schools with your child at an open day or evening or make an appointment with the school secretary. Talk to the head, teachers and other staff. What do you feel about the building where your child will spend a great part of his/her day? Are there signs of the children's work on the walls? Do children there seem to be happy and positive? Do you and the school agree on what you expect from the school? How does the school offer places if there is too much demand (if it's 'over-subscribed')? You'll probably hear much talk about 'catchment' areas – how close you need to live to the school to be sure of a place. A note of caution: how catchment areas are measured can vary from local authority to local authority. They can also change from year to year depending on how many children apply to that school. Just



- APPEALS
- REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

because your next-door neighbour's older child goes to a particular school doesn't guarantee that your child will get in.

As well as how you and your child feel about the school, consider how easy it will be for you both to get to and from the school. It may seem a long time ahead but you might, one day, want your child to be able to travel to and from school alone. Will that be possible? Will your child have friends living nearby? His/her social life will change when he/she starts school and you might want to invite friends (and their parents) home. Will that be practical? You may also feel better if your child can travel to school with a friend.

You could find out whether or not the school encourages parents to get involved. Is there an active **Parent Teacher Association (PTA)**? Perhaps you could talk to members. The school's OFSTED report will also have a section that gives the views of parents. This may be more detailed in some reports than in others.

You might be concerned to protect your child from any kind of discrimination or bullying because of his/her race or culture. Are there other Black and Minority Ethnic or Gypsy, Roma, Traveller children at your chosen school? Can you arrange to talk to any of their parents? Is there a Black Parents' Group at the school? Can you talk to them? Parents you have met at nursery or playgroup may have older children at that school and may be able to give you useful guidance.

You could also raise your concerns with the head teacher of the school and ask to see the school's race equality policy.

You will probably have a long wait to hear the result of your application to a school but you should be told when offers will be sent out. If your child isn't offered a place in one of your chosen schools, you will probably feel extremely disappointed and your child will also need support and encouragement. Your local authority will, eventually, offer you some options either within the authority or outside. You can also keep your child's name on a waiting list for any school in case a vacancy arises later.

Appeals

The letter from your local authority will explain how you can appeal if you're not satisfied with the decision made by any school. The authority also gives you a closing date for any appeal. The appeal will be made to an independent panel, not to the school or local authority. It must be made by the closing date.

You will need to explain why you believe that the school has made the wrong decision *according to its admissions criteria*. The school will explain why it did not offer you a place. The panel will decide whether the school's decision was reasonable or whether your child has a good case for attending that particular school. You don't have to go to the appeals panel alone: you can take a friend, adviser or even a solicitor. You can get information and help on the appeals process from organisations like the **Advisory Centre for Education (0808 800 5793)** or your local **Citizens' Advice Bureau**.

Refugee and asylum seekers

If you are a refugee or asylum seeker, you will need to contact a school to register your child. The head teacher will probably want to talk to you to find out about your child and your family. You should be able to ask for an interpreter, which might be provided by the school or Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) or you can take one with you. It is normal for the school to want to meet with you since information you give them might help them to settle your child into school and you'll be able to find out how the school works. They might also be able to give you advice about other services that you might need. Take the opportunity to ask whatever you feel you need to know about how your child will be educated. Ask if you can see around the school to get a feeling for what happens.

If that school has no places, you can try another school. You can also put your child's name on a waiting list for a place. Or else, you can appeal to an independent panel if you feel that the school's decision is wrong. The appeal will have to be in English.

The National Curriculum expects teachers to plan for the different learning and personal welfare needs



• HELP AND ADVICE

of pupils from all backgrounds, including refugees. The Children Act 2004 and *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* – the Government’s strategy for organisations that provide services to children – outline the responsibility of schools to ensure the well-being and progress of all children, including refugees, by working together effectively with other agencies and services.

Organisations like the **Refugee Council** (www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) can give help and advice. The **National Refugee Integration Forum** (www.nrif.org.uk/) website has useful information.

Gypsy/Roma/Traveller families

The local authority has a duty to ensure that education is available for all children of compulsory school age in their area whether permanent or temporary. Gypsy/Roma/Traveller families who live on temporary or unauthorised sites are included in this duty. Most local authorities provide specialist **Traveller Education Support Services**. You can get help when you move into a new area by contacting the local Traveller Education Support Service.

By law, the children of Gypsy/Traveller families should be admitted to schools on the same basis as any other child.

You may be able to get help and advice from the **Friends, Family and Travellers** site at www.gypsy-traveller.org and many local authority websites will also have sections that provide information.

SOURCES OF HELP AND ADVICE

Parents Centre (www.parentscentre.gov.uk) has information for parents and carers who want to help their children to learn. Key documents are available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Greek, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Vietnamese and Urdu.

Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk/childcare) has advice on choosing quality childcare.

Daycare Trust (www.daycaretrust.org.uk) is a national charity working to promote high-quality, affordable childcare for all. It also provides audio information for

parents in Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, English, Greek, Portuguese, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish and Urdu.

Local **Children’s Information Services** (CIS) provide face-to-face and phone advice on childcare. Telephone **0800 2346 346** (8.00am-8.00pm, Monday to Friday, 9.00am-12.00pm Saturday) for details of your nearest CIS.

Parentline Plus (www.parentlineplus.org.uk) offers support to anyone parenting a child. The website has useful information and a message board that lets you talk to other parents.

The **Foundation Stage** leaflet (www.surestart.gov.uk/publications/?Document=524) gives information on the first part of the National Curriculum from age 3 to the end of the Reception year in primary school. It is available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

Learning Journey (www.parentscentre.gov.uk), produced by the DCSF for the Foundation stage and Key Stage 1, explains the National Curriculum for parents. It is available in a number of community languages.

The Advisory Centre for Education (www.ace-ed.org.uk) offers information about state education in England and Wales for parents of school-age children.

Friends, Families and Travellers (www.gypsy-traveller.org) gives advice and information to Travellers, whether traditional or new, settled or on the road. Telephone **01273 234 777**.

The Refugee Council (www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) has advice lines providing impartial advice on the asylum process, support and entitlements to refugees and asylum seekers. Telephone for general enquiries, **020 7346 6700**.

The Real Histories Directory (www.realhistories.org.uk) supports teachers, parents and the wider community in teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK.

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The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.