



RUNNYMEDE



KEY STAGES 1&2

YEARS 1-6 / AGE 5 TO 11

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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 Key Stages 1 & 2, from age 5 to 11. Other booklets cover:

Foundation Stage	Age 3-5
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.

- WHO'S WHO IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?
- WHAT HAPPENS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?



WHO'S WHO IN MY CHILD'S PRIMARY SCHOOL?

Your child's school will be run by a governing body. Governors have responsibility for the overall policies of the school. The board of governors of a state-maintained school is made up of representatives from: the local authority (appointed by the authority); parents (chosen by parents); school staff (chosen by the staff); the head teacher and – sometimes – community members (appointed by the school).

The head teacher is in charge of the day-to-day running of the school, helped by a deputy head teacher. Class/form teachers teach your child on a daily basis. There will probably also be a school secretary, receptionist, caretaker, nurse and learning assistants. Some teachers might come in specially to teach certain lessons such as music or art.

WHAT HAPPENS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

The school year

In most schools, the school year is divided into 3 terms: Autumn term (September–December); Spring term (January–April); Summer term (April–July). There are school holidays halfway through and at the end of each term. You'll need to make arrangements for your child during school holidays.

Schools also have staff training – or 'inset' – days when teachers need to be in school, but pupils do not. You will be given advance notice of these days so that you can make other arrangements for your child.

The school day is divided into a number of lessons, lunchtime and breaks. Most lessons will be taken by the same teacher.

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. Depending on the school, there may be, for example, halal or vegetarian options. If there are no suitable choices provided for your child, you can talk to the class teacher or head teacher to see if arrangements can be made. Some parents choose to give their child a packed lunch.

Uniform

Some schools may have a uniform for daily wear and for Physical Education. Most schools are reasonably flexible and will consider cultural requirements. For example, they'll allow girls to wear trousers or a headscarf though it's worth finding out if veils will have to be removed inside the classroom. Boys are normally allowed to wear turbans. Some schools adapt their uniforms so that, for example, a uniform shalwar kamiz can be worn. You will need to check what is and isn't allowed. For health and safety reasons, there are normally rules about wearing jewellery.

Behaviour and Discipline

Most schools have rules that set the standard for behaviour. You should be able to see a copy of the behaviour policy (school rules). If your child breaks the rules, there are a number of actions the school might take including giving a **detention** (being made to stay behind in class during break or after school). It is important to know whether the school needs to inform you beforehand. Some schools only tell parents in advance if an after-school detention is for more than 15 minutes. The school might be able to reschedule a detention if, for example, it happens on an important religious day or if you're worried about your child returning home alone in the dark.

Other actions that might be taken include: a reprimand; a letter home; removal from the class; loss of break or lunchtime privileges.

A more severe punishment might be **exclusion** from school for a fixed period (for a maximum of 45 days in total in a school year) when a child has seriously broken school rules or his/her presence would either harm others or disrupt learning. If your child is to be excluded, the school will call you and follow up with a letter that explains the length of the exclusion, why it's being used and who to contact if you want further information.

As an alternative to exclusion, children can be removed from their own class and sent to a designated part of the school, or to another class. This should only happen for a short period of time. Another possibility is that they might be sent to a **Pupil Referral Unit** (a special type of school, run by the local authority for children who are unable to

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attend mainstream school). Again, this would be a temporary measure.

If your child is excluded from school, you will have to make sure that your child is not outside of home during school hours for the first 5 days of the exclusion. If you do not, and your child is seen outside of home at those times, then you could be liable to a fine. If you can provide a reasonable justification for your child being in a public place, then you may not have to pay the fine.

Children can be **permanently excluded** from school as a last resort. If this happens, your child can no longer attend the school (and other schools might be unwilling to take him/her). The school's governing body has to review the decision but even if it confirms the decision, you have the right to appeal to an Independent Appeals Panel. The local authority still has to provide your child with a full-time education, so they must discuss other options with you. These might include your child being sent to a different school or a Pupil Referral Unit or being educated at home.

Statistics show that Black boys are between 3 and 6 times more likely than White boys to be excluded from school and that they are punished more severely than White boys for similar offences. Gypsy/Traveller pupils are also disproportionately excluded. Permanent exclusion can have such serious consequences for your child that it's important to investigate the circumstances and to question why the decision was made.

Physical punishment is not allowed in any school.

You can get help and advice from the **Advisory Centre for Education** (0808 800 5793), which produces a free exclusion pack for parents. The Centre also has an exclusion information line 020 7704 9822 and an exclusion advice line 0808 800 0327.

RACE AND CULTURE

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 says that public bodies (including state-maintained schools) 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. Schools 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 Act, Romany Gypsies and Travellers of Irish Heritage are recognised ethnic groups.

Many schools celebrate Black History Month in October of each year and you may want to find out exactly how they do so and what children learn. Similarly, religious festivals like Diwali, Eidh, Ramadhan, Guru Nanak's birthday or the crowning of Haile Selassie are often commemorated.

If you feel that your culture is not respected and reflected in school life and the curriculum, you can discuss this with staff. If you believe that this is a problem that affects other children in the school, you may want to talk to other parents to see if you can approach the school together, perhaps involving the parent governor and/or the Parent Teacher Association.

This may be more difficult if you're part of a very small minority community but schools might still value your contribution since all students will benefit. In addition, schools also now have a duty to promote community cohesion (good relations between different communities).

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

After Reception, your child will move into Year 1 and, after a year, into Year 2, Year 3 and so on. Years 1 and 2 are called 'Key Stage 1'. Years 3–6 are called 'Key Stage 2'. Children are taught according to the **National Curriculum**.

The National Curriculum outlines what is taught in state schools. It sets out what education all children

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are entitled to, whatever their background, and the standards for learning and attainment. It should also ensure continuity between schools and between stages of education. The National Curriculum is divided into 'Key Stages'.

In primary school, children must study English, Maths, Science, Design and Technology (DT), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), History, Geography, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education.

Other subjects

State schools have to teach Religious Education. Generally, that will be broadly Christian with some teaching of the other major faiths. However, what is taught is usually agreed locally with an interfaith forum and will therefore differ depending on the local authority and the nature of the community.

Pupils might also study Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), Citizenship and, possibly, a modern foreign language.

Concerns about the curriculum

All schools must produce a written statement of their policy on **Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)**, which should be taught as part of PSHE so that pupils 'consider the moral aspects of sex education and are encouraged to develop loving and caring relationships'. You have the right to withdraw your child from part or all of SRE except elements that are included in Science teaching. Independent schools don't have to teach sex education.

You can withdraw your child from **Religious Education** lessons and collective worship.

Some schools will adjust **Physical Education** classes to suit, for example, children who are fasting during the period of Ramadhan. You might want to let the school know if there are other reasons why your child might find PE classes difficult.

HOW WILL MY CHILD BE TAUGHT?

Setting and Streaming

Many primary schools use 'setting' – grouping children according to their ability for certain lessons.

Other schools teach children of different abilities in the same group.

If you believe that your child is in the wrong group or 'set' for a subject, try discussing this with the class teacher to get an explanation of the teacher's assessment.

'Streaming' means that children are split into different ability groups for all lessons.

Children will take formal tests and schools will also carry out 'mock' tests to allow students to learn what it feels like to work in test conditions: following instructions, obeying the rules, working in silence, etc.

Homework

Most children get work to do at home after school and/or at weekends. In primary school this might be, for example, a book to read, spellings to be learned or times tables to practise. There might also be bigger projects. Schools should have a written policy on homework, which you can ask to see.

Parents often disagree with schools about homework. Some feel there's too little, others that there's too much. This is the kind of issue that you can raise with class teachers or at Parent Teacher Association or governors' meetings.

English as an Additional Language

Some children need to learn English as an additional language in primary school. They should be given extra help. Research shows, though, that being fluent in his/her first or heritage language is very important for a child so don't be surprised if he/she is also encouraged to read books in his/her first language.

Although there isn't a legal requirement for education authorities to provide it, some schools may offer some teaching in a child's heritage language.

HOW DO I KNOW HOW MY CHILD IS DOING?

Your child will be assessed and his/her progress compared to what children have normally achieved at various stages. There are 8 levels in the National Curriculum (Level 1 to Level 8). Each level is divided into 'a', 'b' and 'c'. At Key Stage 1 (age 7), most children will normally have achieved Level

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2b. Children who achieve Level 3 are doing better than expected and those achieving Level 4 are doing exceptionally well. At Key Stage 2 (age 11), most children will normally have achieved Level 4b. Children who achieve Level 5 are doing better than expected and those achieving Level 6 are doing exceptionally well.

Children are informally assessed by teachers in school on a regular basis. At the end of Key Stage 1 (in Year 2), though, your child will take a formal test – a **Standard Assessment Test (SAT)**. Your child's results will be compared with children nationally. You will also be able to see how your child's school performs compared to other schools.

At the end of Key Stage 2 (in Year 6) your child will take another National Curriculum test or SAT in English, Mathematics and Science. This test will be marked outside of the school.

Your child's teacher will also regularly assess his/her progress on an informal basis and should discuss any concerns with you.

Reports

You'll be given regular reports in which your child's teacher assesses what level he/she will reach at different key stages. This will give an indication of where your child may need extra help and support and, sometimes, how you can help. You should be kept informed of how your child is progressing so examination results shouldn't come as a surprise.

After your child's SAT examinations at Key Stages 1 and 2, you will get his/her results along with those for all the children in your child's age group in the school plus the national results for the previous year.

Schools hold a **parents' evening** at least once a year when you'll have the chance to speak to the class teacher and see your child's work. You'll normally only have a brief time to do this. Take a friend if you need to. You might also want to take an interpreter or one might be provided by the school.

You should get an annual report giving details of your child's progress. In some schools, reports are translated into the child's home language.

Communication

The school might contact you by phone, text, email or letter. Some letters might be translated. There might also be a named person who will contact you, perhaps a member of staff who is bilingual or has expertise in areas relating to Black and Minority Ethnic or Gypsy/Roma/Traveller communities.

WHAT IF MY CHILD NEEDS EXTRA HELP IN SCHOOL?

Local authorities and schools can access money from the **Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant** to target additional support for minority ethnic groups that are underachieving. It can be used to provide help for pupils for whom English is an additional language and those who are newly arrived such as asylum seekers and refugees.

Children may also be given one-to-one help with literacy or numeracy or they may be taught in small groups.

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 SEN 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.

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 Special Educational Needs Coordinator

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- OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



(SENCO) in school and try to get an assessment by an educational psychologist.

Getting a statement of special educational needs

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

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 make sure that children with SEN get the right help. A free copy is available from the **Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)** publication centre on [0845 602 2260](tel: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).

Incorrect assessments

You may feel that your child has been wrongly diagnosed as having special educational needs. Research has shown that Black Caribbean and dual-heritage Caribbean pupils are 1.5 times more likely to be identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties than White British pupils. And children who have not been identified by the school as being from Traveller heritage may be thought to have SEN when they have simply missed periods of schooling or have moved around different schools. Discuss concerns with the SENCO (take a friend with you, if necessary).

If your child speaks English as an additional language, this should not be confused with SEN. He/she may simply need extra help with English. Also, if your child has experienced trauma (this may be particularly relevant to refugee and asylum-seeking families), it's worth telling the school. They may be able to access specialist help. You might also need to check if your child has previously unidentified difficulties with hearing or sight as these could cause problems with hearing what the teacher says or with

reading from boards or computer screens. 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 guidance on the **Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunals** website at www.sendist.gov.uk. Schools must have a SEN policy and must tell parents how they can complain and how complaints will be dealt with.

Getting help

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

WHAT OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT THE SCHOOL PROVIDE?

School trips

In the early years at primary school, any organised trips are likely to be day trips, often to a museum or gallery. They are not compulsory but they are intended to support your child's learning and can be a great deal of fun for pupils. You will usually be asked to sign a form giving your permission. There may be a small cost for fares or entrance fees and you might have to provide a packed lunch.

Some schools organise a residential trip within the UK in the final year of primary school (Year 6). There is normally a cost involved.

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

Out-of-class activities

Your child's school may organise extra activities after school or at weekends. They might include clubs devoted to special interests such as sport, computers, chess, art, etc. They are usually free, or a small fee might be charged to cover the cost of materials. Some schools also have activities such as football (often run by parents) at weekends.

In addition to clubs, many schools have other supervised activities at the beginning and end of

• WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

the school day. There might be breakfast clubs that start at 8.00am and after-school playschemes or homework clubs up to 6.00pm. There may also be after-school activities in youth clubs or community centres. There will usually be a charge.

With its Extended Schools programme, the government wants all schools to offer extra activities from at least 8.00am to 6.00pm by the year 2010.

If you're working, you'll need to find out what arrangements you'll need to make if you can't pick your child up at the end of the normal school day.

WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN SCHOOL?

Schools have responsibilities under Health and Safety legislation to make sure that pupils are safe while they're in school. Although it is not written into law, courts have accepted that head teachers and teachers have a 'duty of care' towards their pupils in school.

Health

Schools 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 school is likely to call you and ask you to collect your child.

Most schools have a nurse who will carry out regular checks on your child's hearing, sight, growth and general development. A dentist might visit to check teeth. Sometimes schools will arrange for vaccinations to be carried out. They'll ask for your agreement. If your child has a medical condition or needs to take medication regularly, you should let the head teacher know.

Your child's school should also have:

- staff who have been trained to recognise signs of abuse;
- a senior member of staff who is responsible for child protection;
- procedures for checking on staff suitability before they are allowed to work with children;
- a child protection policy.

Racism

As a parent, you may be concerned about the possibility of your child having to deal with racism in school. Schools and teachers need to acknowledge that racism exists in society and it's therefore possible that it might exist within schools. They need to confront racism wherever and whenever it appears in schools.

Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, public bodies (including state-maintained schools) 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.

Schools 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 school's race equality policy is just as important in schools with few children from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) 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 schools 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 school is independent, you may still want to ask if they have a race equality policy.

If you believe that your child is subject to racism in school, you might first talk to his/her teacher or head teacher. If you are not happy with the results, you can discuss the matter with the parent governor representative or other governors. 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.

- WILL MY CHILD BE LOOKED AFTER IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?
- DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL?



Bullying

Bullying includes written, verbal and physically abusive behaviour. More recently, much has been written about 'cyber' bullying via email, websites and mobile phones. Children may not tell parents about bullying, sometimes through fear, sometimes out of embarrassment. Changes in behaviour or the quality of their work might be a sign that something is wrong. Your child might suddenly no longer want to go to school or they might be unwell more often than usual or have difficulty sleeping. He/she may 'lose' more belongings. Or he/she may start asking for more money.

Try to talk to your child about bullying, preferably before it's likely to happen. It's vital to listen to what your child does say about school. There may be clues even if he/she doesn't want to be explicit. Do you know your child's friends? Have they said anything to their parents? Is your child's teacher aware of any changes at school? Might your child talk to other members of your family or to a friend?

Schools must have written policies and procedures to prevent and deal with bullying. You can ask to see these policies.

If your child is being bullied, make notes of what is happening and talk to his/her teacher. Write down what action the teacher intends to take. If you're not satisfied, then you can talk to the head teacher or a parent governor. If that doesn't work, you can take your complaint to the local authority and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) or OFSTED. You could also consider moving your child to a different school.

Being told that your child is bullying others would come as an enormous shock. None of us wants to believe that our child is a bully, but the fact is that bullies do exist in schools. It's important to stay calm as you listen to any allegations. Listen carefully, too, to what your child has to say. While you naturally want to defend your child, do consider the possibility that your child might not behave exactly the same at school as he/she does at home. If you believe that your child has been wrongly accused of bullying, then take this up with the head teacher.

If there is any possibility that your child is bullying others or is part of a group of bullies, then you need to discuss this as calmly and positively as possible with your child and the school and see if there are any sources of help. It is vital not to ignore this. You and your child need not feel alone and isolated.

You can get help and support.

- **Parentline Plus** has a helpline: **0808 800 2222**
- **Kidscape** has a helpline for parents: **08451 205204**.
- **Advisory Centre for Education** gives advice to parents and children on all school matters: **0808 800 5793**.
- **The Children's Legal Centre** gives free legal advice on all aspects of the law affecting children and young people: **01206 872466**

Racist bullying

Unfortunately, some children do experience racist bullying in school or on the way to and from school. This might take the form of verbal abuse or even physical abuse. It is important to inform the school's head teacher about any incidents of this kind.

The school should have a written race equality policy and you should be able to get a copy. If the school is unwilling or unable to take action to prevent the bullying, you can complain to your local authority. If matters become serious enough, you may want to make a complaint to the police.

You can get help and advice from all the organisations mentioned under 'Bullying' above.

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL?

You need to tell the school if your child is going to be away for any reason – if he/she is ill, needs to go to the dentist or visit a potential secondary school, for example. If you want to take your child on holiday during term time, you need to discuss this with the head teacher. If you take your child out of school during term time without permission, you could be fined. If you're going to be away for a long period, some schools will provide National Curriculum work that can be done while your child is away.

Schools will allow children to take time off school to celebrate major religious occasions but it is a good

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idea to let them know in advance, in writing, that your child will be absent.

If you are leaving the area or changing schools, you must inform your current school. Unexplained or long absences will be investigated by an Educational Welfare Officer.

Each school day is considered to be divided into half-day 'sessions' and most pupils have to attend all sessions unless there are very good reasons. There are special arrangements under Section 444(6) of the Education Act 1996 for Traveller children because the government understands that you might have special needs that make this difficult. If you can show that your work means that you have to travel around and that your child is registered with a school and has attended as regularly as possible, you won't be prosecuted if your child has been to school for at least 200 sessions in the year.

The Vulnerable Children's Grant is available to local authorities to improve access to education for vulnerable children, in particular, those who are unable to attend school or whose circumstances make it difficult for them to do so. Key groups include children who are looked after by the state, those who can't go to school for medical reasons, Gypsy and Traveller children and asylum seekers.

Truancy

You need to make sure that your child goes to school unless there is a good reason such as ill health. Missing lessons will, eventually, mean that your child will have difficulty catching up. Keeping children away from school for shopping trips, to help at home or even to assist with work gives the impression that school does not matter.

If your child has problems at school and doesn't want to go, then it's important to try to deal with those problems by talking to his/her teacher and/or the head teacher and, maybe, getting support from other members of the family or outside agencies such as the **Advisory Centre for Education (0808 800 5793)** or **Parentline Plus (www.parentlineplus.org.uk)**. If your child doesn't go to school and is not being home-schooled, an Educational Welfare Officer will contact you. Since it's the responsibility of parents

to make sure that their children are being educated, they can be fined or even imprisoned if they do not cooperate with the local authorities.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL?

If you have concerns about the way in which the National Curriculum is being delivered or about how your child is treated in school, you might first of all contact his/her teacher. If that doesn't work, try discussing the matter with the head teacher. If your complaint still isn't sorted out, then you can complain to the governing body of the school in writing.

State schools have a procedure for dealing with complaints and you can ask to see a copy of this. For some complaints, a special governors' complaint panel may be called.

Local authorities also need to have a complaints procedure so if you are dissatisfied with the way in which the school is dealing with the problem, you can make a complaint in writing to the local authority.

As a last resort, you have the right to complain to the Secretary of State in the Department for Children, Schools and Families if you feel that the school's governing body or the local authority is acting 'unreasonably'. This would mean that they are behaving as no reasonable school or authority would do in the circumstances.

WHAT DO I DO DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS?

There are likely to be holiday playschemes in your area run by the council, community groups or private organisations. There are usually a range of supervised activities including art, drama, games, sport and perhaps outings to local parks, museums, cinemas and, sometimes, to the seaside or a fun park. There is normally a daily fee and an extra charge for outings. Children usually need to take a packed lunch. Some churches, mosques, temples and community centres also organise activities during holidays.

The **Break Out** website (www.culture.gov.uk/breakout/) gives ideas and information on activities

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for children aged 5 to 14 after school and during the holidays. Many of them are government funded and are, therefore, subsidised or free.

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

Some local authorities give help with fares to and from school if your child lives more than a certain distance from school. Some local authorities offer grants to help with the cost of school uniforms.

Children are entitled to free school meals if their parents receive any one of the following: income support; income-based jobseeker's allowance; support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; child tax credit, but without entitlement to working tax credit and with an annual income that isn't more than a specified figure. School meal vouchers can't be used for packed lunches.

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 part of eligible childcare costs. There is a maximum amount. You can get a claim pack by calling 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 or visit the website at: http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/

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

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S PRIMARY SCHOOL?

School events

Most schools have their own website. It can help to keep you informed of school activities, policies, events, timetables and opportunities for you to be involved.

Schools may organise cake stalls, fetes, fundraising evenings, concerts and plays or social events for parents and teachers. These may require some contribution from parents in the form of making cakes, sewing costumes (often at the last moment because your child has forgotten to tell you that he/she needs a costume for the nativity play!), painting scenery or just their presence at the event.

Some schools also hold meetings for parents to explain or discuss academic matters or proposed changes to school policy. These may be opportunities to have your opinion listened to and to hear what other parents think as well.

In addition, if the school has a **Parent Teacher Association**, it might organise a welcoming event for new parents and will have regular meetings during the year.

Your child's school will also be inspected regularly by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and at that time you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire giving your opinions, concerns or praise for the school. Again, this is a good opportunity to have your voice heard.

Home-school agreements

It is likely that you will be asked to sign a home-school agreement that lays out what you can expect from the school and what they, in turn, can expect from you. It is not legally binding and you do not have to sign it, but do read it carefully to understand what the school believes are your responsibilities. Home-school agreements should be reviewed from time to time and parents should be consulted before changes are made.

What can I do to help in school?

In primary schools, there are a variety of ways for parents to be involved. Having a presence in the school ensures that staff are aware of your commitment to your child's education and this

- HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S PRIMARY SCHOOL?
- HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE SCHOOL?



may make a difference to the way in which your child is viewed. If staff know who you are – and you know them – it may mean that potential problems can be sorted very early before they have a chance to escalate.

As a parent you may be invited to come in to read with individual children or a group of children on a regular basis. You could also be invited into school to tell stories or demonstrate a particular skill for special events such as Black History Month or to talk about the Traveller lifestyle. You might be able to volunteer as a mentor or become a teaching assistant. There could be special projects that require parental assistance, such as maintaining green spaces, painting walls, sorting out the library or being part of a committee that's trying to raise funds for a new science block.

Some schools have a system of class representatives chosen from among parents. You could put your name forward if you're willing to keep in touch with what's happening in the class and school and to pass on that information to other parents. It could also be a useful way of getting to know other parents and other children in your son or daughter's class as well as the class teacher. In any event, it's worth getting to know your class rep.

You might consider becoming a governor at your child's school if a vacancy arises. You'll need to find out more about what governors do, perhaps by shadowing a current governor. You'll have to set out your vision for the school and get other parents to vote for you. Being a governor may not be easy; a commitment of time is needed and some parent governors from Black and Minority Ethnic groups report that they feel isolated, ignored or sidelined. However, the rewards may be great for you and your child, particularly if you can get support from other parents or groups.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD OUTSIDE SCHOOL?

It may be difficult to find the time to support your child at home. Your child does need your interest and, particularly, your praise and encouragement when he/she has done well. That needn't take too much time and can make a lot of difference.

You can support your child at home by listening and talking to him/her, finding out what's happening in his/her school life. Inviting his/her friends to your home might give you an insight into what goes on at school and how your child is coping. You'll also get to know other parents and might learn about aspects of the school that your child doesn't remember to tell you or want to talk about.

Television and computers aren't all bad. You can watch television together and discuss what's happening or points that are raised. Some computer games have educational benefits and you can always play them with your child if you're concerned about the contents. There are also websites that help with homework topics and they can be very entertaining.

You can go to libraries and choose books to read together. You might also be able to borrow audio tapes, videos and computer software. Most libraries have computers, and you'll be able to book time on them so that you can have free access to the internet.

Many museums and galleries don't charge an entrance fee and you might enjoy learning with your child by visiting them together. Some organise special activities for family groups.

Homework

Making sure that homework gets done and checking it will help you to find out what your child is learning. There's no need to worry if you don't understand, you can get your child to explain it to you, which will also help to reinforce what is being learned.

Try to listen to times tables or spellings. You might be able to help your child by using simple counting or language games. If your child is learning English, you can still help by reading with them in your first language. Fluency in a child's first language will also help with English. It will help your child if you can make sure that he/she has a quiet time and space to do homework.

Extra teaching

Supplementary schools (sometimes called 'complementary' schools) offer additional help and support with National Curriculum subjects outside of school hours. They may also have mother-tongue

- PREPARING FOR THE NEXT STAGE OF MY CHILD'S EDUCATION
- TYPES OF SCHOOL



classes. Supplementary schools can help to boost your child's confidence. You can find out more at www.supplementarieschools.org.uk. Religious and cultural lessons may take place in madrassahs, mosques, churches and temples.

Your child may benefit from help from a private tutor outside of school hours. Tutors may specialise in a particular subject such as Maths or English or non-verbal reasoning (often needed for secondary school entrance examinations). Tutors will charge a fee. You can often get recommendations for tutors from other parents.

Exams

Most teachers try to keep children relaxed about SAT examinations. They'll set 'mock' exams so that children get used to what will be expected of them. Children do, though, sometimes feel the pressure. You might want to try to reassure them about the tests and explain that they are not being judged – the aim is to find out what they have learned.

Cultural identity

Many parents feel that it's important that children should be encouraged to respect each other's cultural backgrounds in school. They want to help to strengthen their own child's confidence in school by maintaining traditions and beliefs. Contact with friends and family, attendance at the church, temple or mosque can be important. Many parents also make a special effort to talk about family and cultural history or to make sure that this is taught outside of school.

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

The **Black History Month** sites at www.black-history-month.co.uk/ and www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk have information on activities and events taking place during October of each year.

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

Education doesn't have to be in a school environment. Some parents, for many different reasons, choose **home education**. This might be temporarily – if, for example, you are not offered a place in a secondary school – or long-term because you believe that is best for your child. 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.

Most parents, though, decide to stay within the school system and the time to choose a secondary school will come much sooner than you think. Since many decisions need to be taken, it can be a stressful process for parents. Some children will be moving to secondary school after Year 6. 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 authority, children transfer from middle school to high school at age 13 or 14. Many parents give themselves and their child a huge advantage by beginning to research schools and their entrance requirements very early on.

TYPES OF SCHOOL

Most schools are either 'state-funded' or 'independent' (fee-paying) schools. State-funded schools must all follow the National Curriculum. There are different types of state-funded schools.

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.

• CHOOSING A SECONDARY/ HIGH SCHOOL



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

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

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

Specialist schools focus on specific subject areas like arts, sports or technology while still offering a broad education in line with the National Curriculum.

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

Academies are schools that are set up using sponsorship from business, faith or voluntary groups working in partnership with the government. They are 'publicly funded independent' schools. They take children of all abilities but can select up to 10% of students a year on the basis of their ability in certain specialist areas. Academies are not bound by the National Curriculum.

Independent 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 make scholarships or bursaries available, possibly linked to a particular subject such as music, drama, science or art.

Independent boarding schools charge for board and lodging and tuition.

Depending on where you live, you may need to start thinking very early about a secondary school for your child. Some parents decide to send their children to private or independent schools. Some of these schools take children earlier at the age of 10 so this is something that you need to think about. If entrance is by examination, you may want to consider finding

a suitable private tutor to familiarise your child with the examination process very early on. In any event, you'll probably need to apply for a secondary school before December in the year before your child is due to start secondary school.

CHOOSING A SECONDARY/HIGH SCHOOL

You can get information about local schools from your local authority and sometimes you can find school prospectuses in your local library. You don't have to send your child to a local school. But it is important to think about how your child will get to school, particularly if he/she will be travelling alone.

Details of schools can be found on the **Directgov** (<http://schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk/>) website and the achievement and attainment tables (often called 'league' tables) produced by the DCSF are available at www.dfes.gov.uk/performance tables. Many schools have their own website. You can also telephone any school that you're interested in and ask them to send you a prospectus.

You can see OFSTED reports at www.ofsted.gov.uk but you do need to combine these with visits to the school and other research. There is a great deal that the reports can't tell you that might be relevant to your child. Some local authorities hold a schools' fair where you can meet staff and pupils from each state school in the area and pick up prospectuses.

Your child's teacher may have suggestions about which secondary schools would suit him/her best and it might be worth talking to the teacher at an early stage, particularly if you have built up a good working relationship. The school might organise a secondary school transfer meeting to give you information about open days, how the admission process works and to allow you to meet parents and students who have previously gone through the process.

Other parents, especially those with older children, may have valuable information such as what kinds of scholarships are available, which schools specialise in a particular subject and will take students based on their abilities in that area, which tutors are best at preparing children for which exams, etc. Getting an idea of where other parents are hoping to send their

• CHOOSING A SECONDARY/ HIGH SCHOOL



children might also give you valuable insights into local schools.

Your child may also want to go to the same school as his/her friends from primary school. It's useful to network as much as you can. Find out what other parents and local newspapers are saying about local schools. Do you and your child want a single-sex school? How important is your faith to you both?

You can see how children from a particular school behave at the beginning or end of the school day by being there and watching. You can learn a great deal. Your child will want to go to and from school alone at some stage. What transport is available? Will your child have friends living nearby? His/her social life will change in secondary school and you might want to invite his/her friends (and their parents) home. Will that be possible? You may also feel better if your child can travel to school with a friend.

You might also want to find out whether the school encourages parents to get involved. Is there an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA)? Perhaps you could talk to members or maybe there's information on the school's website. 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.

Visiting schools

Most schools will have open days/evenings in the autumn term (September to December). This is your chance to listen to what is said about the school and to ask your own questions. Find out about the dates early on from the school's website or by phoning so that you can plan which school you'll visit, and when.

You can also call the school to make an appointment to see the head teacher. You could even visit some schools the year before you have to make a choice since going to lots of schools can be physically and mentally tiring.

Visit the schools with your child. Talk to the head, teachers and other staff. What are your impressions of the building where your child will spend a great part of his/her day? Does the children's work decorate the walls? Do children seem to be happy and positive? Do you and the school agree on what you expect from

the school? Does the school offer all the curriculum subjects that your child wants to study? If your child has special talents or, indeed, particular difficulties, try to find out how the school might deal with them.

Find out about the curriculum subjects that are on offer. For instance, if your child is gifted in languages, does the school offer all the languages that he/she might want to study. What about the other subjects that he/she is interested in? Are there after-school clubs that cater for your child's interests?

You'll probably be shown around the school by current pupils. You can ask them about their opinion of the school and you can get a good impression of the school by how they respond. Remember, though, that schools are likely to choose their best pupils to show parents around.

Some of the schools that you visit may require an entrance examination if they select on the basis of ability. Other schools set entrance examinations for 'banding' purposes – so that they can ensure that they take children from a wide range of abilities. On open days, be sure to find out about the dates of examinations as well as any scholarships or bursaries that are on offer and how your child might qualify.

Find out how, exactly, you apply for a place in that school. Some schools, for instance, may want you to fill in their own application form and write an accompanying letter to the head teacher. Faith schools may require evidence of religious attendance. Make notes since you'll probably visit a number of schools and it is easy to miss some key details.

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 because your next-door neighbour's older child goes to a particular school doesn't guarantee that your child will get in. It is crucial to find out about the admissions criteria for each school to get a good idea of where you're likely to get a place for your child. Criteria might include:

- CHOOSING A SECONDARY/ HIGH SCHOOL
- REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKERS



distance from the school (sometimes measured in a straight line – ‘as the crow flies’ – sometimes by safest walking distance); a statement of special needs; whether your child has an older brother or sister at the school; etc.

Schools and local authorities must follow strict rules to make sure that admissions are managed fairly. You can find out more about the School Admissions Code at www.dcsf.gov.uk/sacode/.

Secondary school application

Your local authority will send you an admission form and information about the application process. This should also be available from your child’s primary school. There will be a deadline for applying and it is really important to stick to this. You will need to complete this form even if you are applying to schools outside your local authority area.

The admission form will give you at least 3 choices in order of preference and your application will be passed on to each school. You will receive only one offer of a place at a state school. If your child is selected for more than one of your chosen schools, your local authority will pass on to you only one offer – the one you ranked highest.

Deciding on an order of preference for your choices may be difficult since you’ll need to bear in mind the criteria of each individual school. Remember, too, that only your local authority is required by law to offer a school place to your child. If you don’t choose any school within your authority and you are refused a place at your other choices, then places at the better-performing schools in your area may well be filled.

You can also state, on the form, your preference for a single-sex or faith school.

You could make fewer than 3 choices but you’ll need to be sure that you’re not missing any opportunities. The process can be complex so you’ll need to do a lot of research and take as much advice as possible.

You should be told when offers of school places will be sent out. You may have a long wait to hear the result of your application. If your child isn’t offered a place in one of your chosen schools, you will probably

feel extremely disappointed and your child will need a lot of support and encouragement because he/she may feel rejected. 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.

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 to the panel 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, if necessary, 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. Schools can sometimes 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 feel 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

- GYPSY/ROMA/TRAVELLER FAMILIES
- HELP AND ADVICE



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 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 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.

Local Children's Information Services (CIS)

provide face-to-face and phone advice on childcare. Telephone **08000 96 02 96** (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.

Learning Journey, produced by the DCSF for the Foundation stage and Key Stages 1 to 3, explains the National Curriculum for parents. It is available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

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. They have a general advice line **0808 800 5793**, an exclusion information line **020 7704 9822** and an exclusion advice line **0808 800 0327**.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (www.qca.org.uk) maintains and develops the National Curriculum. The website has information and responses to frequently-asked questions.

National Black Boys Can Association, a national organisation that supports Black boys between the ages of 9 and 16, has a handbook, *Empowering Black Parents to Empower Their Sons* (www.blackboyscan.co.uk).

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