

Checklist for visiting colleges

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities

A guide for parents and carers

When leaving school a young person may consider continuing their education at a college. Parents/carers play a vital role in supporting their young person to look at colleges who could provide the appropriate courses and support for them.

However, the young person's views should be at the centre of this process – even though they will need support.

It is important that parents/carers and young people visit a number of colleges to ensure that they are properly informed before making a choice.

Please note each college will have different arrangements for visits of parents/carers, and young people, so it's important to contact colleges to know their arrangements.

Below are some points you might want to consider when making a visits, they are only suggestions; you may have other questions or points you want to answered.

Before you visit a college

- Read the college's online information re: SEN information, SEN policy,
- Consider what the college is able to do for your young person and how they can help you.
- Think about what you would like to know, the questions to ask and the people you would like to meet.

- Read the college's own brochure/prospectus.

Visiting the college

- Arrange a date and time for the college visit, also the name of a contact person.
- Allow enough time in college to make an informed decision.
- First impressions are important, but you should base any decision on responses, experiences and information..
- You may want to visit the college with a friend or relative so you can discuss important issues later.
- Think about how the young person will travel to and from the college, e.g. actual travelling time and the daily arrangements you will need to make.
- If possible try to meet the staff who could be involved with the young person e.g. student support staff, teachers and learning support assistants.
- Make sure you ask your questions, and if needed make another appointment.(You may be able to do this over the telephone, or maybe by email).

Things to explore:

- What is the structure and timetable of the week, how will the teaching and learning meet the young person's needs
- How will any other of the young person's needs be met
- It would be useful to have the names of the staff working with the young person and their roles.
- What arrangements are there for parents to discuss progress and also contribute to target setting and planning, learning opportunities, including homework.

External support

Things to explore:

- If relevant to your young person: which external professionals visit the college, eg speech and language therapist, educational psychologist, and occupational therapist etc
- How is advice from visiting professionals implemented e.g., would the young person have to miss the same lessons or subjects.

The college in general

Things to explore:

- Special adaptations and equipment the young person may need?
- How will the young person be supported outside lessons - in particular lunch and break times
- Are there any extra activities available after college
- Are there any appropriate parents groups
- Will you be asked to contribute towards the cost of anything else, eg books, organised trips, extra equipment etc.
- Look at the range and condition of equipment/resources in classrooms, workshops etc.
- What are the ICT (information and communication technology) facilities.
- Useful to have looked at the college's behaviour and anti-bullying policies.
- Does the college have links with other colleges – perhaps to provide support or for learning opportunities etc.
- If it is a mainstream college are there opportunities to access outreach support from a special college if appropriate.

College atmosphere - overall impressions

- Does the college feel welcoming?
- Can you imagine whether the young person would be happy in the college.
- Do the other young people in the college seem well behaved/happy?

After the visit

- Discuss your thoughts and feelings about the college with the young person, and anyone who went with you, partner, relative or friend etc.
- If you want more information you could telephone or visit the college.
- If the young person has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or is undergoing an EHC needs assessment please feed back your views to the EHCP. as soon as possible.

Residential colleges

Additional points to think about and questions to ask:

- Find out what links there will be between the college and you, such as home visits or letters/emails.
- Find out how and when you will be contacted about progress.
- Find out how and when you will be contacted if there is a problem.
- Arrange to meet the person who will be responsible for the overall care of young person out of college hours.
- Visit the dormitory or bedroom the young person will use.
- What privacy will the young person have?
- Will the young person know who to go to if they are worried or have a problem?
- What arrangements are there for the young person to telephone home or receive telephone calls?
- What arrangements are there if the young person needs attention or is ill during the night?
- What are the bathroom facilities and routines?
- What arrangements are there for medical care?
- What opportunities will there be for the young person to join out of college activities, for example youth groups, sport, other leisure activities?
- Will the young person get the same opportunities to shop, cook, clean and relax as

he or she would at home?

- If it is proposed that they remain at college over the weekend, what would be the range and programme of activities?
- It is important that you are happy with the residential arrangements for the young person and that you are confident that the college can meet their needs.

*adapted from a Hampshire County Council publication