

A photograph of three young children in primary school uniforms running happily on a paved path. The child in the foreground is a Black boy with a red and blue backpack, smiling broadly. To his right is a white boy with blonde hair, also smiling and running. In the background, a girl with blonde hair is partially visible, also running. They are all wearing dark blue V-neck sweaters over white collared shirts and grey trousers. The background shows a brick building and a black metal fence.

How to choose a primary school

15 helpful tips for advising your parents

an in-depth guide

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Moving between schools and key stages is one of the most stressful times for a parent. They are moving from the nurturing, small nursery setting they have known and loved to big school which can be a daunting move. Many parents will reach out to their trusted nursery setting to discuss worries and concerns about the move into primary school. We spoke to Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of Ellington Infant School to create 15 top tips for advising parents about primary school transition.



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Choosing a primary school: meet the expert, Adi Ahmet

With a strong background in local council school improvement, Adi Ahmet thrives as a well-loved Headteacher at Ellington Infant School. Adi is passionate about the learning and development opportunities schools, in particular, EYFS and Key Stage 1 settings, can offer children. Leading an Ofsted rated 'Good' setting, Adi recognises the efforts of the whole Ellington team in supporting new and existing parents from their setting.



How important is it for parents to choose the right primary school?

The relationship between parents and the school will be lengthy, from EYFS to Year 6. They are supporting their child to grow and develop holistically through the most influential and significant learning periods of their lives. Parents must make a good choice of school, thinking beyond EYFS.

Not all schools are the same or offer the same curriculum, ethos, and values. Adi explains that the parents know their child the best and should aim to find a school to nurture the child's strengths and interests.

"Parents should discuss the essential criteria they want in a school (faith, non-denominational, academically driven, sport-focused) and aim to find a school that aligns with their beliefs,"

Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of
Ellington Infant School.

It is important to remember parents may experience some restrictions and disappointments when choosing a school. Practicalities such as catchment areas, religious requirements and admissions criteria are ultimately the deciders for the range of public schools available to parents. "Parents should be open-minded about visiting potential primary schools; what they have heard or experienced when at that school may no longer be the school offer," Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of Ellington Infant School.

Questions parents ask about moving to primary school from nursery settings

Parents will often ask your nursery team their opinions and thoughts on which primary school is best for their child. A high standard has been set for the first educational experience their child has experienced. It is natural for parents to be concerned that the same level of support and personalisation may not continue into primary school.



Offering advice to parents during this period of heightened stress and worry can not only strengthen relationships, it can also place your setting in an authoritative position for knowledge and support through word-of-mouth recognition. When advising parents, achieving the correct balance between information and opinion can be a challenge. You will need to support your staff to recognise what information will help parents with their worries and what personal opinions are not necessary to share to remain professional.

How to best support parents with the move to big school

Stay professional

Your staff may have heard of a particular school's reputation from word of mouth, but this does not mean it is correct or relevant to share with the parents. Your staff must remain objective and impartial when supporting parents through this choice. It is a choice only they can make. Encouraging parents to visit the school in question will help them make their own decisions on the school's suitability for their child.

Signpost to trusted information sources

It can be challenging to be certain that the information you share with your parents is the most recent and relevant. If you are unsure of the relevance of information, be sure to use local council websites and similarly trusted sources. If in doubt, direct the parents to contact the school office of any school they are interested in for clarification of information. Most schools' visiting restrictions are now relaxed after Covid controls. It is best to remind parents to check the most recent guidance on mask-wearing and any limitations before attending a school visit.



Listen to their worries

Your Early Years setting is a place of safety and comfort for children and their families; parents may feel comfortable sharing worries and concerns with your staff. Whilst remaining mindful of your staff's time constrictions, allow parents to share their fears when they pick up their child from your setting. Parent mental health and well-being can be positively impacted by sharing worries or concerns with a trusted team member.



Free parent workshops: supporting the move from nursery to primary

Running an informative workshop (or several) can offer your parents the chance to ask the questions they may have about the transition process between nursery and primary school. The move to a big school can be a scary process for adults too! Therefore by providing the parents with the early opportunity to form new friendships with other parents with children going to the same school, you are supporting parental mental health at your setting.

You may offer parent-support workshops to your existing families or extend to interested parents with children in alternative nurseries to broaden your marketing reach. Once again, this increases positive word-of-mouth advertising for your business. You may want to share this article with your Level 2 and Level 3 apprentices and task them with creating a simple PowerPoint presentation for the workshops as part of their 20% off-the-job hours.



15 tips for how to advise parents on choosing a primary school

Adi gives his advice on the top areas to cover, those most frequently asked during the transitional process...

The application process

Some parents can be surprised just how early the primary school process begins, with school visits often beginning when the child is two years old. School applications are submitted the January before the September the child will begin school. Most children start full-time schooling the September after their 4th birthday, meaning they will turn five during their first year at school.



Depending on the child's birthday, parents may complete the school application process when their child is three years old. Parents should be directed to the local council website for the deadline information for school applications. The process opens in September and usually closes in the middle of January. EYFS parents will be informed of the school they have been allocated to on the 16th of April, 2023.

What types of schools are there?

Parents may be unaware of the different types of schools they can apply to and the features of these schools. Including a section in your parent-workshops, explaining the features of each school type can be useful in helping to decide which school they would consider for their child.

✓ **Maintained Schools:** ran and organised by the local council; local council policies and procedures govern these schools.

✓ **Academies:** are funded directly by the government and are run by an academy trust. There may be more than one school in a trust making it a Multi-Academy Trust

✓ **Independent Schools:** a fee-paying school which may follow its own curriculum or the curriculum of the local public schools. These settings offer boarding options and often cater to a larger range of ages.



✓ **Free Schools:** are funded by the local government but are not run by the local council. Meaning they have more control over the pay and conditions of teaching staff and the structure of the school day.

✓ **Special Schools:** often requiring an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), these specialist settings are equipped to support children with additional needs.

✓ **Faith Schools:** underpinned by a particular religion, they can be governed by additional boards or organisations within the faith.

The right school for them

A parent may want a school that mirrors their beliefs on behaviour, sanctions and rewards, or they may have high academic achievement goals. These desires are necessary for choosing the right school for their child and understanding the limitation of choice they may experience due to catchment and admission criteria. “It is vital that the parents choose a school they can see their child thriving in,” Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of Ellington Infant School.

The lingo they might hear

Schools have an extensive list of acronyms and abbreviations that can be daunting to first-time parents. Include a glossary of well-used phrases they may experience during their research and school visits.

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Difficulty

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

DSL: Designated Safeguarding Lead

EAL: English Additional Language

ECT: Early Career Teacher

EHCP: Educational Health Care Plan

EP: Educational Psychologist

ESW: Educational Social Worker

EYFS: Early Years Foundation Stage

GLD: Good Level of Development

KS1/2: Key Stage 1 and 2

MAT: Multi Academy Trust

PPG: Pupil Premium Grant

RI: Requires Improvement

S&L: Speech and Language

SATs: Standard Assessment Tests

SEMH: Social Emotional Mental Health

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disability

SENdCO: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator



School Reputation

Ofsted reports are beneficial to get an idea of a school's provision, priorities and running structures, but they are not the be-all and end-all. It is worth explaining to your parents the importance of observing the date the Ofsted inspection took place, the name of the headteacher at the time of inspection, and the improvements the school may have made since their most recent inspection.

Some settings may be deemed 'Outstanding' and, yet their Ofsted inspection was over ten years ago. In contrast, a school may be deemed 'Requires Improvement' and has since made considerable improvements to its provision.

"It is important to judge the school on your own merits after visiting the setting, asking the questions and meeting the headteacher."



Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of Ellington Infant School

Communication

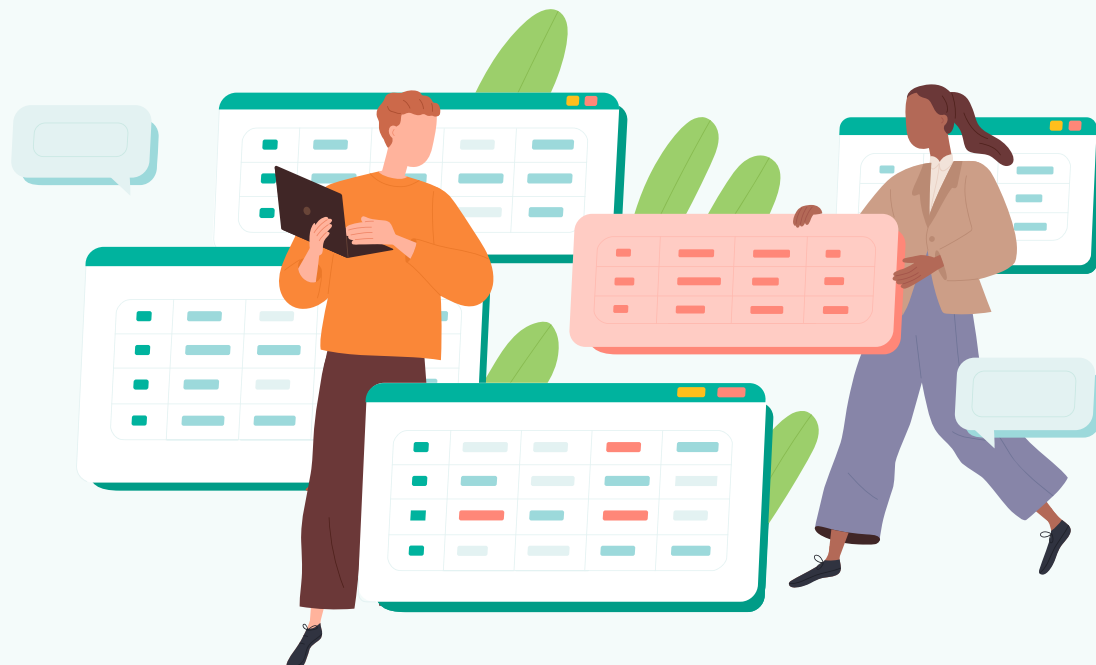
"Two-way communication is vital for a successful partnership throughout the primary school experience", Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of Ellington Infant School.

The school's communication system or software of choice can be a contributing factor to a parent's choice. A school that values parental input and offers regular and purposeful communication opportunities can assist parents by reducing anxiety, encouraging engagement with the child's learning and keeping parents informed of exceptional progress with ease.

Timings of applications

Parents may think their child is not ready to begin full-time schooling in September; they can delay full-time schooling due to these grounds if their child is in full-time education by compulsory school age. Compulsory school age begins the next full term after their 5th birthday.

For example, if a child was born on the 31st of December, they must start full-time education at the beginning of the next term (after the winter holidays). Parents who have the intention to delay their child's start date must still apply by January before they are due to begin in September.



Visits

Adi recommends parents to visit any primary school they are considering for their child, "It is vital to see the school on a normal working day, to get a feel for the values and teaching practices." Schools can offer bulk visiting slots or individual visits, showing parents a taste of their school day.

Encourage your parents to research the school before they visit, expand on the information they find via the school's website, and help them create a list of questions they may want to find the answers to during the visit. Adi reminds the importance of being shown the whole school as well as the Early Years, "Their child will progress from EYFS to Year 6, it is useful to see the whole school provision to get a real feel of the setting," Adi Ahmet, Headteacher of Ellington Infant School.

Questions for parents to ask on a visit

1. Does the school have a family liaison or support officer?
2. How are children supported or challenged through school?
3. What activities are available to the children at lunchtime?
4. Are there many extra-curricular clubs available?
5. How are the children celebrated and praised?
6. Does the school have specific practices for well-being?
7. Are there any Teaching Assistants in each class or year group?
8. How can parents become involved with the school?
9. Is there wraparound care or clubs available?
10. What are the transition processes?
11. Does the school offer any visits or play and stay afternoons before they begin?
12. What is the school's communication platform?



Clues of a good school

Alongside the school's most recent Ofsted report, there are several clues to spot a good school for parents to choose for their child. Ultimately, a school must cater for and challenge every pupil they educate, meeting the diverse needs of each child and developing them holistically.

Look at the learning environment created for the children: Is it bright and vibrant whilst being mindful of sensory needs? Is children's work celebrated and displayed around the school? There should be a large focus on the learning offered to the children. What is the intention for the children to have securely understood by the time they leave for secondary school in Year 6? The school will be well presented and organised with approachable and friendly staff, using a simple and easy-to-use communication platform to encourage parental engagement.

Curriculum

The curriculum the school will use will be of great interest to new parents; all the information they should need will be able to be found on the school's website. It should also be explained further during any school visit. It can be useful to encourage parents to look into the Phonics programmes the school uses; it may marry up with the nursery's current programme, but isn't essential.

Diligent parents may wish to research further into the schemes used to best prepare for September. If the first topic focused on is surrounding animals and their habitats, family trips to the local park and forests for animal spotting can set their child up with necessary concrete experience. Adi reminds, "The EYFS curriculum is centred around play; children in EYFS should not be chained to their desks completing formal work regularly. This is still a time for exploration and play."

Useful policies

Adi Ahmet recommends lightly researching any policies that are of interest to the parent for prospective schools, again focusing on their child's individual needs. The SEND and inclusion policy may be valuable to read if the parent has particular concerns surrounding SEND. The following policies are recommended as good starting points to gather information about a school before a school visit:

- ✓ Behaviour and Rewards
- ✓ SEND
- ✓ Admission Criteria
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Wellbeing and or Mental Health

Admission policies

Admission policies are one of the most important documents to be aware of when a parent chooses a primary (or secondary) school for their child. The policy will include the catchment areas that are eligible to apply for a position. In addition, it may include oversubscription information that may detail if siblings that already attend the school have priority and any feeder nurseries or schools that may take priority for a place.

Pupils eligible for Pupil Premium Grant Funding may be given a higher priority for placings than non-eligible children. There are often myths that moving a child to a nursery closer to the primary school of the parent's choice can increase the likelihood of securing a place; these are often incorrect and can cause unnecessary upset and disruption for the child before transitioning again to big school.

Practicalities

It can be useful to remind parents of the practicalities they should bear in mind when considering applying for a place at a specific primary or infant school.

Working parents may benefit from a school that offers an array of after-school clubs for their children to enjoy, helping with a later pick-up time. Similarly, if the parent does not have access to a car or is within walking distance, researching the local bus routes to calculate the length of travel time may be of interest before applying.



Website

Every school will have a school website; they have statutory information that must be shared on the school website. It can be useful to include these in your parent-workshop presentation to help new parents find this vital information:

- ✓ Admission arrangements
- ✓ Curriculum offer
- ✓ Behaviour policy
- ✓ Ofsted report
- ✓ Performance table data
- ✓ School's latest Key Stage 2 attainment and progress measures
- ✓ SEND and inclusion policy
- ✓ Pupil Premium Funding Grant information



Preparing children for big school 2023

Your nursery can help support parents and children for their next step in April 2023 towards big school. These small preparations can enable a smooth transition, allowing a positive start to their newest educational adventure.



Name recognition

To help your children recognise their pegs, trays or personal space in primary school, it is useful to help them identify the starting letter of their name, the length of the word, and the sounds they make before they move towards primary school.

[Explore a selection of activities for outstanding communication and language development.](#)



Anxiety support

Children may be particularly anxious about moving away from nursery towards primary school; encourage mentally healthy habits as coping strategies to support a smooth transition.



Independence

Although they will not be expected to be spot-on with toileting care, it can be a huge benefit when starting primary school. Celebrate independence and good hygiene from the get-go. Independent skills include self-dressing and tidying up, all valuable skills when enjoying active PE lessons and finishing tasks ready to begin a new one in the classroom.

Reading

An area Adi Ahmet is incredibly passionate about is reading, “Children learn through reading; it underpins everything and a love and excitement around reading should be fostered as soon as possible.” Nurseries will already have a well-structured story time and literacy provision. The next step is to engage parents in this love for reading before they join primary school.



Ready, Set, Go!

Transitioning from nursery school to primary school is an emotional time. You and your team have poured endless love, care and patience into building confident and enthusiastic learners. Supporting your parents to feel optimistic about the next educational step is a kindness that will be appreciated in both the short and long term by your families.

Use these helpful tools and strategies to strengthen your nursery's brand awareness and word-of-mouth marketing. Remember that the parents you help now may become your customers again, should they have another child to enrol at your setting. Share this article with your staff for your next team meeting.

