

A mixed bag – a parent’s visit to nine schools

This is a complement to Gareth D. Morewood’s conversation with a parent about the difficulty of finding the right school for SEND, which you can read in full here: <http://blog.optimus-education.com/back-foot-parents-view-choosing-right-school-send>

‘I visited nine primary schools in total before I chose the best fit for my child. The disparity between them was striking.’

Specialist school

‘The first school we visited had enhanced status for children with communication and interaction issues. We decided against this because the specialist service was outreach and children within the school did not get enhanced support/expertise compared to any other schools in the area.’

A small village school

‘We visited this rural school but decided against it because there was no staff capacity within the school if our son’s teaching assistant (TA) wasn’t in work for some reason. The school was too small and had just two classes.’

Village school with lots of outdoor space

‘This school had lots of detail about SEND on the website. We decided against it because the headteacher said – plainly, and to my face that “if you bring your son to this school it will cost us money and that will affect the budget for everyone else”.

She then attempted to explain something about the financial formula for SEND children and asked a colleague loudly in front of other staff to explain the finances to me.

I made a quick exit, drove to the nearest layby and burst into tears.’

A large rural school

‘This school had enhanced status for children with behavioural and emotional issues. The headteacher suggested I visit other schools, which felt like his way of saying they already had enough to handle.’

A town school with an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted

‘I knew of a couple of boys with autism at this school. We decided against this one after the headteacher asked we were paying for speech and language therapy privately. She simply couldn’t understand that the NHS are unable to provide anything above the bare minimum.

She also said that the professionals would decide what was best for our son at meetings and we would be “invited”. To be “invited” made it sound like the parent has little control rather than being integral.’

The local Catholic school

‘The headteacher advised us that it would put undue financial demand on the school bearing in mind the number of SEND children already on roll. I saw him again at a later date and he apologised for the message he had delivered. He said he would take our son.’

Two fee paying private schools

‘We were interested to see if they were very different to state schools. The first seemed desperate to take us, but more to make up their numbers. They were welcoming but from the questions they asked they wouldn’t have been able to accommodate and they wouldn’t have known that fact until our son had started.

The second private school visit involved a chat in the headteacher’s office. He talked about previous children whose difference had been the “subject of dinner party discussions for sure”. Both big nos.’

Our local catchment area school

‘The headteacher listened to me talking non-stop for half an hour. On a later visit I met the SENCO who said “You’re son will be very welcome at our school”.

That sentence made all the difference. This was the school we picked.’