



**Transition Support
for Parents**

**Applying for a
Secondary School Place
for your child**

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Dear Parent or Carer

Applying for a Secondary School Place for your child

During the first few weeks of next term, as your child begins his or her final year of primary school, you, as parents, will have to consider and apply for a secondary school place for your child. This process takes some time for you, the admissions authorities and schools to complete so the whole process starts more than a year in advance. I know that some of you have already been thinking and asking about this process. If you have not gone through the process before with an older child, it may appear to be a little daunting. However, do not worry ... we are here to help you in plenty of time!

This booklet aims to take you through the process of applying for a secondary school place for your child. It includes general information about the application process and things you should think about when selecting a school for your child. This booklet should be read alongside the information you have already receive.

In September, I will be running an evening meeting for parents at which I will explain the process of applying for a secondary school place and answer any questions you may have. Parents have always found these meetings very useful. **This meeting will take place on Thursday 4th September 2014 starting at 7.15pm. In wanting to avoid two evening meetings for Year 6 parents that week, this will follow the meeting regarding the visit to the Isle of Man which starts at 6.15pm.**

If you require further information at this stage please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Ian Beard
Headteacher

Co-ordinated Admissions Services

All applications for secondary school places (other than independent schools) are managed by the **admissions team** of the **Local Authority (council) in which you are a resident**. You will receive a pack of information from your local authority about how to apply for a secondary school place. Packs may be sent to your home address or distributed via school.

If you wish to apply for a place in a school in another authority you can include these schools on the form you return to your own local authority. Each admissions service works with the neighbouring authorities to determine demand for and allocate places. **It is possible, therefore, for a Manchester resident to apply for a place in a Trafford or Stockport school using the Manchester form**. You only need to apply separately to independent schools. You need to contact independent schools directly. This booklet does not deal with applications for independent schools.

Admissions Teams Contact Details

Manchester : www.manchester.gov.uk/admissions

Integrated Admissions, Children's Services, Town Hall
PO Box 532, Manchester M60 2LA ☎ 0161 245 7166

Trafford : www.trafford.gov.uk/admissions

School Admissions, Children's and Young People's Service
4th Floor, Waterside House, Sale M33 7ZF ☎ 0161 912 5007

Stockport : www.stockport.gov.uk

Admissions Team, Services to People, 3rd Floor
Stopford House, Stockport SK1 3XE ☎ 0161 217 6028

Timescales / Deadlines

The process of applying for a place includes some very important deadlines. This year, the deadline dates are as follows:

June / July	Application packs issued to parents
Sep / Oct	School open evenings / decision-making Entrance examinations
31st October	Deadline for completion of applications
1st March	Parents informed of outcome / places
31st March	Last date for appeal applications
May / June	Appeal hearings
September	Children start secondary school

The most important deadline is the date by which you **must return your application form**. If you do not apply on time, your application will be treated as a **'late application'** and **considered after other applicants**. You may not, therefore, be considered for a place at your preferred schools.



Online Application

All parents are now asked to apply for places online. Last year, there were no paper forms unless parents requested them. If you do not have access to the internet to make an online application or need help in doing so, we can arrange for you to use a computer in school with the help of a member of staff.

Choosing a Secondary School

Choosing a school, particularly a secondary school, for your child can be a daunting task. It may be one of the most important decisions you make as parents. You will want to know that the school you choose can meet the needs and interests of your child for at least the next five years (or beyond if there is a Sixth Form) and offer a wide range of activities and opportunities through which your child can develop and flourish as they move towards more advanced studies, the world of work and adulthood.

Types of Secondary School

The first thing to understand is that **all secondary schools are different** and one school may offer a very different curriculum, range of activities, subject specialisms, facilities or support systems to the school down the road. There are **different types** of secondary school to consider including:

- **high schools (including specialist schools and colleges)**
- **faith schools (e.g. Catholic, Islamic)**
- **academies**
- **grammar schools**

During the past few years, children from Northenden Community School have transferred to **many** different secondary schools, sometimes as many as 13 different schools in one year.

In September 2014, the schools our children are transferring to include Parrswood High School, Manchester Health Academy, Chorlton High School, The Kingsway School, Newall Green High School, Altrincham Grammar School, Sale High School, The Barlow RC High School, Sale Grammar School, Altrincham College of Arts, Urmston Grammar School and William Hulme's Grammar School.

Specialist High Schools, Colleges and Academies



It is rare nowadays to find a secondary school which does not specialise in one or more subjects.

Most high schools or academies have a specialist status as sports, technology, maths, language, performing arts or enterprise schools or 'colleges' and tend to have extra facilities (sports halls, theatre spaces, etc.) so that children can take specialist courses and excel in these subjects, particularly at GCSE level or in the sixth form. In our local area, the following Manchester schools have specialist status:

- Manchester Health Academy – Health and Sports
- Manchester Enterprise Academy – Business and Enterprise
- Parrs Wood High School – Technology
- Chorlton High School – Performing Arts (Music, dance, drama)
- St Paul's Catholic High School – Engineering
- Newall Green High School – Arts, Science with Mathematics
- Whalley Range High School – Business, Enterprise and Sport



In recent years, Manchester has made a huge investment in its secondary schools. Many high schools and their students have benefited from **extensive new building work** with some schools undergoing a **complete new build or refurbishment**. Many of our local secondary schools, including the new academies, are now state-of-the-art centres for learning.

Academies

Much has been publicised recently about the government's wish that more schools, including primary schools, become 'academies'. However, the original meaning of the term '**academy**' applies to a secondary school which is funded directly by central government and is not controlled by the local authority. They do, instead, have partnerships and some have sponsorship from business or other organisations related to their specialism. Most academies are brand new schools which have replaced closed high schools. However, existing high schools can now 'convert' to academy status and many are doing so, often in partnership with their local primary schools. Chorlton High School and St Paul's Catholic High School have recently become converter academies.

Faith Schools

Faith schools are those schools which have at the centre of their ethos and practice a commitment to a particular faith or religion. These may be Church of England, Catholic, Jewish or Islamic schools. Faith schools usually give admissions priority to those pupils who practice a particular faith but many faith schools also admit many pupils who do not come from any particular faith background.

Grammar Schools

Grammar schools are selective schools and cater for those children who have excelled in academic terms and have passed an entrance examination. Manchester does not have any state grammar schools except William Hulme's Grammar School which has academy status. This school admits students of all abilities. Most state grammar schools in this area are found in Trafford.

School Open Evenings

The most important thing you and your child should do when choosing a secondary school is visit each of the schools you are considering.

Most secondary schools hold at least one open evening during September or October. Some schools host their open evenings as early as July. Most open evenings include a talk from the Headteacher or other staff, a 'showcase' of achievements and specialist facilities and an opportunity for you to talk to staff and students and see some activities or lessons in action. It is very important that you and your child use this time to get a feel for a school's ethos, facilities, curriculum and pastoral and care systems on offer.

Our advice is that you and your child should attend the open evenings of all of the schools you are considering. You should think about your child's interests and abilities and seek to find what each school can offer your child.

Ask yourself:

- Is the school welcoming?
- Will my child be happy here?
- Does the school have good facilities?
- What are the results like?
- What does the latest OfSTED report say about the school?
- Will the school be able to cater for my child's needs?
- Will my child be able to make friends here?
- Will my child be able to develop existing and new interests?



Visits during the School Day

If you are unable to attend an open evening, a school may offer you and your child the opportunity to tour some of the school at another time, perhaps during the school day. This may give you a more realistic picture of a typical day in the life of the school but may not necessarily enable the school and its students to 'show off' all of its facilities and achievements in the time available to you.

School Prospectus and Website

Most schools publish a printed (often 'glossy') prospectus which should contain information about the school's aims, achievements, specialisms, facilities and admissions policy. A prospectus is meant to 'sell' the school so most of the information will present a positive picture of the school and its achievements.

Most schools now have more information on their website than they do in printed form. These often contain much more information about the school and can give you a greater insight into the day-to-day life at the school. It is worth looking at school websites to find out more about:

- the school's policies (behaviour, Special Needs, etc.)
- latest OfSTED report (also available from the OfSTED website)
- recent news and events (usually found in online newsletters)
- school trips, including residential events
- extra-curricular activities
- awards and other achievements
- the school calendar of events
- school uniform
- staff roles and responsibilities
- engagement with parents



Applying for a Place

The starting point for your application is the information pack you will receive from your local authority. It will contain information about the process, including deadline dates for application.

In order to apply for a place you **must** complete an online application form. We understand that paper copies of the application form are no longer supplied unless you request one. After you have registered online, your application can be started and changed at any time up to the deadline date in October. Guidance notes for applying online will be available in your pack.

If you do not have access to the internet to make an online application or need help in doing so, we can arrange for you to use a computer in school with the help of a member of staff.

When you apply online, you will be asked for

- your child's **Unique Identifier** (UID)
- details of your child
- details of parents and carers
- your preferred schools in ranked order
- reasons for your preferences (siblings, medical, etc.)
- details of older siblings attending the school
- other relevant information



You can change your online application at any time up to the deadline date. When you have completed your application, you will need to **submit** your application otherwise it will not be registered. Once you have **submitted** your application, you will receive an e-mail confirmation which you should keep as proof that you completed the process on time (just in case there is a problem later on).

Preferred Schools

When you apply for a secondary school place, you can list more than one school. On the form, you can list a number of schools in **ranked order of preference**, starting with your first choice. The more schools you name, the better chance you will have of being offered a place at a school you have considered. If you name only one or two schools, this severely limits the chances of you being offered a place unless you have a very high chance of getting a place because you already have children at the school and/or live very close to it.

Just because you select a school as your first choice does not mean that you will be offered a place at that school. Each school has a limited number of places and admits students based on their admissions criteria.

Admissions / Oversubscription Criteria

Each school has its own **planned admissions number (PAN)** and **admissions criteria**. These are shown in the booklet you will receive from the Local Authority.

For all sorts of reasons, a school cannot offer places to more pupils than it can accommodate or teach effectively. If a school does not receive more applications than there are spaces available, it will be able to offer a place to everyone who has chosen the school.

When there are more applicants than places available (oversubscribed), the **admissions or oversubscription criteria** are used to rank all applicants and decide who does and who does not get a place. The local authority will rank all of the applicants according to the criteria (see below) and offer places to a number of children until the **planned admissions number** is reached.

Admissions Criteria for High Schools and Academies

Most secondary schools follow the same admissions criteria or rules. However, more and more secondary schools, particularly academies, are setting their own admissions rules. In Manchester, the admissions criteria for **some schools** are as follows.

Places will first be offered to children in the following categories

1. children who are 'looked after' by the local authority
2. children who have exceptional social/medical needs or a disabled parent
3. children who have an older brother or sister attending the school when they take up their place (but not in the sixth form) and living at the same address
4. children who attend a Manchester primary school, prioritised by straight-line distance from home
5. all other children, prioritised by distance from home to school

So, if your preferred school has lots of applicants, you will have a **better chance** of getting a place if you already have an **older child** at the school. If you do not have older children attending the school, your chance of a place then usually depends on the **distance you live from the school**. The nearer you live to the school (**as the crow flies** rather than by road), the better your chance of getting a place.



"It's about 2 miles"

Equal Preference System

The admissions service operates an **equal preference system**. This means that all of your choices are considered before any preferences are looked at. The admissions team first looks to see if you can be offered places at any of the schools you have chosen and then, if places are available, allocates places according to your preferences.

Example

Let's imagine that you apply, in preference order, for places at three schools, A, B and C. You will be ranked against the admissions criteria for each school.

The following scenarios may occur:

- If you meet the criteria for all three schools and can be offered a place at all three, you will be offered a place at the school which is at the top of your list.
- If the school at the top of your list is oversubscribed and you do not get a place there, you may be offered a place at the school which is second or third on your list.
- If all named schools are oversubscribed, you will NOT be offered a place at any of the schools you have chosen. You may be offered a place at a school that you have not listed on your form and have not considered. This is why you should look at and include a number of schools on your application form. A fourth or fifth choice may become important if your top three schools are oversubscribed.

Careful Choices

It is very important that you are realistic in your choices. Consider the likelihood of your child obtaining a place before you state a high preference for a school. **Do not waste your options** naming schools which are very unlikely to give your child a place. This particularly applies to popular schools, schools in other authorities (particularly Trafford) or schools which are far away from where you live.



Offer of Places

In early March 2015, you will receive a letter from your Local Authority letting you know at which school your child has been allocated a place. Hopefully, this will be your first choice school (or at least one of the schools you have listed on your application form) and you will accept the place you have been offered.

Every year there are children who are not allocated a place at **any** of the schools which parents have listed on the form. This is often because parents have been unrealistic in their choices and have chosen schools which are always heavily oversubscribed or because parents have limited their choices to just one or two popular schools which may be some distance from home.

If this is the case, the admissions service will offer your child a place at the **nearest community** school or academy which has places available. This may be at a school which you have not considered. The authority keeps a **waiting list** for all schools and you will be able to find out where on the waiting list your child has been placed. As other parents begin to decline places, children move up or down the list and may eventually be offered a place at a preferred school.

Grammar School Admissions

If you want your child to attend a grammar school, you need to be aware that all grammar schools will require your child to take an **entrance examination** and that places will only be offered to some (but not all) children who pass the entrance examination (they are ranked). Years ago, there was a single examination (the '11+') which was used by a number of grammar schools. However, all grammar schools now set their own entrance examinations.

Some grammar schools provide examples of the tests. Practice papers can also be bought from booksellers and online. It is worth ensuring that your child has plenty of practice completing sample tests well before they have to take the real tests. They are not like any of the work or tests we do in school and we do not provide coaching or tutoring for these tests. Here is an example question ...

**Shape ONE is to SHAPE TWO as
Shape THREE is to WHICH OF THE FIVE SHAPES A-E?**

L J r a b c d e

Your grammar school choices should be included on the application form and named alongside other schools. You may also need to complete a separate application form for the grammar school, the deadline date for which is usually in September. The results of any selection tests will determine whether or not your child meets the admissions criteria and is offered a place.

Your Right to Appeal

If you are not offered a place at one of your preferred schools, you have the right to appeal. Information about this process will be included in your offer letter which you will receive at the beginning of March. You will have a limited amount of time to register an appeal.

You will need to submit an appeal in writing and you may be invited to attend an **appeal hearing** at which you have an opportunity to present your case to an **independent appeals panel**. Your appeal needs to present a **strong enough case** to suggest why your child should be admitted to the school. This could be for a number of reasons including academic, social or special needs, special interests (e.g. arts), family circumstances or medical conditions. Schools do not generally like to increase their numbers beyond their **planned admissions number** and will provide a statement to the appeals panel stating why additional children should not be admitted.

School Support for your Appeal

In submitting a case for appeal, you may ask the Headteacher to provide a letter of support. Before writing a letter of support, the Headteacher will need to **discuss with you in person** the basis of your appeal and see a **copy of your appeal statement** or letter so that any case you put forward can be agreed. The Headteacher's letter is offered **in support of your appeal**. It does not offer any additional information or reasons why your child should attend a particular school. Nor can it discredit the school at which you have been offered a place unless there is very clear evidence to suggest that the school will not meet your child's specific needs. The Headteacher does not attend panel hearings.

Appealing for a Grammar School Place

If you are appealing for a grammar school place, you will need to present a **strong enough case** to suggest why your child should be admitted to the school despite the fact they may have not passed the entrance examination.

Some explanation needs to be given as to why your child did not achieve the required marks in the selection tests. Be careful to be truthful in your appeal letter as you may be asked to provide **evidence** of any mitigating circumstances, illness or injury. An appeals panel may also be interested to know whether or not your child has received any tutoring for the entrance examination. Please note that grammar schools request references from primary schools and these have to be written realistically and truthfully.

You need to be **realistic** in your assessment of your child's ability and potential. It is unlikely that your child will cope with the demands of a grammar school education if they have fallen significantly short of the pass mark for the selection test.

If you are asking the school to provide a letter of support, it will be obliged to offer a realistic and truthful assessment of your child's potential, predicted attainment levels, attitude to work and effort. It is **unlikely** that the school will fully support a grammar school appeal for a child who has not shown a consistent aptitude and effort towards academic work over a period of time.

The Headteacher may refuse to support an appeal if it is felt that the appeal is based on false information or evidence or, in the case of grammar schools, if it is felt that effort or predicted attainment falls short of expectations.



Transition to Secondary School

Once you have accepted a place at a secondary school, you should, in the summer term, receive a letter from the secondary school with information about the induction and transition process for your child and their eventual move to secondary school in September.

Most secondary schools organise at least one day during the summer term when all Year 6 pupils go to their new schools for a full day. These **induction or transition** days aim to remove some of the children's worries and enable students to make some new friends, meet their tutor and Year 7 teachers and get used to parts of the building before they join their new school in September.



Transition To Secondary School

Most secondary schools are much bigger places than primary schools and some children find the move a little daunting to begin with. However, our experience is that within a few weeks they return to tell us that secondary school is brilliant and most children never look back!

Good luck!

NOTES AND QUESTIONS