



What to Ask During a School Visit for Students in Special Education

SCHOOL VISIT TOP 10 TIPS

1. Call ahead and ask what time and days are best to visit.
2. Bring a copy of your child's most recent IEP.
3. Write down the date you visited the school.
4. Write down the names and titles of the people you speak to on your visit.
5. Describe your child to the staff at the school. Explain what special services your child is receiving.
6. Ask how parent visits typically work.
7. Try to be a passive observer; just watch; don't interrupt the class.
8. Take notes. Write down positive things you see and things you don't like.
9. Ask questions if you are confused or have concerns.
10. Recognize that most people are uncomfortable when being observed.

THE SCHOOL AS A WHOLE

What to ask...

- What grades does the school serve?
- What disabilities does the school serve?
- How many years are students usually here?
- Are there other schools in the building? What grades do they serve? Do students in this school share space or interact with students from other schools in the building?
- Are there opportunities for my child to be included in activities with other students without disabilities? If so, how does that work?
- Are there any after school activities, programs, or sports teams? What are they? How is busing coordinated for these activities?
- Do students wear uniforms? Are uniforms mandatory?
- Is there recess every day? Where does it take place?
- When and where is lunch served? How do you accommodate food allergies? Do students with disabilities eat with the other students? How many students are in the cafeteria at once?
- Do students go on field trips or out into the community?
- Does the school offer 12-month services? What do students do over the summer?

What to look for...

- ✓ Is the building neat and clean?
- ✓ What is displayed in the hallways and on bulletin boards?
- ✓ Does the building appear to be over-crowded, or is it underutilized?
- ✓ If the school has uniforms, are students wearing them?

THE CLASSROOM

What to ask...

- Which class would my child be in?
- How many students are in the class?
- How many teachers?
- How many aides or paraprofessionals? What training do the paraprofessionals have? (Some examples might be training in behavior support, health training, etc.)
- What is the ratio of students to teachers? Make sure it matches your child's IEP.
- Do children work individually, in small groups, or as a class?
 - How do you provide individual or small group instruction?
 - How often will my child be in a small group (smaller than the normal classroom size)?
- Are students with different disabilities in the classroom together?
 - What kinds of disabilities?
 - How does the school determine who to group together?
 - Will the school do any new testing to decide what class my child should be in? If so, what kind of testing?
- How many grade levels or ages are combined in one classroom?

What to look for...

- ✓ Where is the classroom located in the building?
- ✓ What materials and equipment are available in the classroom? Are they accessible, appropriate, interesting?
- ✓ Is student work displayed?
- ✓ What are students working on? How does this compare to your child's abilities?
- ✓ Are the students involved in their schoolwork?
- ✓ Is the classroom accessible for your child?

THE TEACHER

What to ask...

- Who would be my child's teacher(s)?
- How long has the teacher been teaching at the school?
- How much experience do they have working with children with disabilities? With my child's disability?
- How do they use assistive technology in the classroom?
- How do they collaborate with related services providers?

What to look for...

- ✓ Is the teacher generally skillful in teaching the students?
 - Do they give step by step instructions and break down tasks?
 - Are they easy to understand?
 - Do they present information differently when a student is struggling to understand?
- ✓ Do the teachers and assistants appear to work well together?
- ✓ Do the children seem to like the teachers?
- ✓ Are the children spoken to by name?

CURRICULUM

What to ask...

- What is the daily schedule? Is it consistent?
- What kind of instruction will my child be receiving? What are they learning in...
 - Reading and writing?
 - Math?
 - Science?
 - Social studies?
- What curricula or programs does the school use?
- How does the school measure progress?
- What standardized tests do students take?
- When do students work on IEP goals? Who works on my child's IEP goals?
- Are any students alternately assessed? How many?
- Does the school offer remediation in reading or math? How does that work?
 - Do all students get remediation, or just some?
 - How often and where is it provided?
 - Small group or individual?
 - Do you use any specific reading or math programs (sometimes called a methodology) for remediation?
 - What training do the staff have in remediation?
- Are daily living skills incorporated into the curriculum? What programs or experiences does the school offer?
 - Does the school provide any teaching or learning outside in the community (at a bank, supermarket, etc.), often called community-based instruction? What does that look like?

What to look for...

- ✓ What textbooks is the school using? Do they look like they are related to a methodology/program?
- ✓ Are there extra tables for smaller group instruction?
- ✓ Who is teaching in the room? Is the paraprofessional doing any of the instruction (i.e. what the teacher should be doing)?

RELATED SERVICES

What to ask...

- Ask about the relevant service providers. Does the school offer...
 - Speech-language therapy?
 - Occupational therapy?
 - Physical therapy?
 - Counseling?
 - Who provides counseling (guidance counselors, social workers, or psychologists)?
 - Does the school have any social skills programs or groups?
 - Are there any other therapies that the school provides?
- How many days a week are the therapists in the building and working with students?
- Is the school able to meet all of my child's IEP mandates for related services?
- How are related services scheduled?
- Where do they take place?
- Does the school have a sensory room or gym?

What to look for...

- ✓ Does the school have separate spaces to provide related services? Are the spaces shared by multiple therapists?
- ✓ Are students getting related services in the hallways or other public spaces? Are they able to focus, or are they distracted?
- ✓ If the school has a sensory room or gym, what equipment do you see?

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS

What to ask...

- Does the school use a school-wide behavior system?
 - If the school uses levels, what does it mean to be on each level?
 - If the school uses school-wide positive incentives, what are they?
- What is the school's approach to discipline?
- Does the school have a board-certified behavior analyst?
- How does the school respond to behavior outbursts or crises?
- Does the school ever use restraints?
 - How does the school decide when to use restraints?
 - Are staff trained in using restraints?
 - How many students have been restrained in the last month?
- Does it have a "time-out" room?
 - When are students sent there? How long are they usually in the "time-out" room?
 - How many students have been there in the last month?
 - Who supervises students in the "time-out" room?
 - Can I see that room?

What to look for...

- ✓ Is the teacher in control of the classroom?
- ✓ Are students wandering the hallways unaccompanied?
- ✓ Is staff yelling at students? Are students yelling at anyone?
- ✓ How does staff deal with disruptions?
- ✓ How do students handle changes in class or breaks between class periods?

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

What to ask...

- Can parents observe the classroom? Do they need to make an appointment?
- How can parents stay in contact with the teacher or therapist?
- When/how are parent conferences scheduled? Do you meet with parents on a regular basis?
- When and how are progress reports shared?
- Is there a parent organization or support group available?
- Do you offer parent training?

What to look for...

- ✓ How are you greeted when you enter the building?
- ✓ Are there signs posted welcoming parents to the school?
- ✓ Are signs and materials translated into other languages?
- ✓ Are other parents at the school when you visit? How do they like the school?
- ✓ How are parents treated by school staff? Do they appear to be upset?

TRANSITION/POST-SECONDARY SUPPORTS

What to ask...

- How often do students move to less restrictive settings?
 - How does the school decide when students are ready?
- Where do most students go when they leave this school?
- Who is responsible for transition planning?
- Do students participate in internships or vocational programs?
 - What does that look like?
 - How do you decide who participates in these programs?
 - Are these programs in the school or the community?
- Is there a college and career office?