

THE TRANSFER PROCESS TO POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL



Advice for Parents of Children in Primary Six



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**Please retain this leaflet for future reference.
You will need it when your child is in Primary Seven.**

I. INTRODUCTION

As your child is now in Primary Six you may be beginning to give some thought to the next stage of their education. When your child is in Primary Seven you will be required to apply for a place in a post-primary school. This leaflet provides parents with early advice about the sorts of things to think about in making a decision about which schools to apply to next year. It sets out the main steps in the post-primary transfer process. It explains:

- The role of parents: what you can do to help your child transfer to post-primary school.
- How parents can prepare for this role: what things you can think about in choosing a school for your child.
- How parents complete their child's application to post-primary school.

The post-primary transfer process is competitive and no child is guaranteed a place at the school of their choice. By following the guidance in this document you will maximise your child's chances of securing a place at a school of your preference.

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs have a separate transfer process. The Education Authority will discuss with the parent a suitable post-primary school placement for their child as part of the review of the child's statement.

A summary of the information in this leaflet is available on NI Direct (www.nidirect.gov.uk).

This leaflet is also published on the Department of Education's website (www.education-ni.gov.uk).

The Department will provide the document in other formats (such as large print, braille etc) or in another language, where reasonably practical. If you wish to request this document in another format, please contact School Admissions Team using any of the following methods:

By email to: schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk

By writing to: School Admissions Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road, Rathgill
BANGOR, Co Down BT19 7PR

By telephone: 028 9127 9231

By text phone: 028 9127 9472

By fax: 028 9127 9417

2. MAIN STEPS IN THE TRANSFER PROCESS

The formal transfer process will begin when your child is in Primary Seven. Below are the key stages in the process and an indication of the timing of each stage. Precise dates will be set out in the information which will be published on the Education Authority website by Christmas of your child's Primary Seven year.

IN YOUR CHILD'S PRIMARY SEVEN YEAR:

Summer preceding P7	Parents who intend to select at least one post-primary school that uses an entrance exam as part of its admissions criteria should familiarise themselves with the testing timetable, in particular the date by which parents must enter their child for the tests. Registration for the tests generally opens during the May of a child's P6 year and closes by September of that calendar year. Further details can be found on the following websites (depending on which exam/s your child will be sitting): www.pptcni.com/ and https://aqe.org.uk/
Before Christmas	Information about the transfer process, including key dates, will be published on the Education Authority website (www.eani.org.uk/admissions) alongside a searchable online directory – 'the Schools Directory'. You can use the Schools Directory to find out: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ How many places are available at each school; and■ The admissions criteria that will be used by each school to decide which children are admitted if the school receives more applications than it has places available.
January	You can ask any post-primary school to supply you with a free copy of its prospectus. This will contain additional information. You will also be able to visit schools on their Open Days/Nights. Details of dates and times (which may be earlier than January) can be found in local newspapers or obtained directly from schools. Guidance will be made available by Education Authority to help you complete your application. When applying, you will be asked to list, in order of preference, the post-primary schools (at least four) that you would like your child to attend.
February	The deadline for applications traditionally falls in February, however the exact date will be specified in the information about the transfer process published on the Education Authority website.

From February until the issue of placement letters in May	Your child's application will be processed according to parental preference, with the school named as a first preference applying its admissions criteria based on the information provided. The form may need to be passed to other schools named as preferences before the process is complete.
Towards the end of May	You will be informed if your child has been successful in gaining a place at a post-primary school of your preference. If your child has not been successful, the letter will ask you to nominate other schools drawn from a list of schools with places still available. You will also be advised on how you can appeal against an admissions decision. This information usually issues towards the end of May.
Within two weeks of placement letters issuing	For a two-week period after placement letters issue parents can submit an appeal against an admissions decision. Appeals can only be upheld if it can be shown that a child has not been admitted because admissions criteria have been applied incorrectly.

3. THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE TRANSFER PROCESS

You have a very important role to play in the transfer process:

- You will help your child decide at which post-primary schools he/she will seek a place.
- You will then complete your child's transfer application to these schools.

Parents have the right to express preferences for the schools they would like their child to attend, but admissions are limited by the physical capacity of the accommodation available and **no child can be guaranteed a place in any school** or any particular type of school. It is not uncommon for children to fail to secure a place at any of the schools listed on their application. The post-primary admissions process is a competitive one and in considering your child's application a school will decide if your child meets its admissions criteria if it has more applications than places available. You should list at least four schools on the application, including at least one non-grammar school, to reduce the possibility of your child not being admitted to a school of your preference. **It is your responsibility to ensure sufficient preferences are listed on your child's application.** Your child will only be admitted to a lower preference school if higher preference schools have filled up and are unable to admit your child. Failure to nominate at least four schools, including at least one non-grammar school, will increase the likelihood that your child fails to secure a place at a school of your preference.

4. WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL

In making these decisions it may be helpful for you and your child to think about:

- Your child's views on where he/she would be happiest.
- Your own, and your child's, impressions of schools.
- Travel to school and the arrangements for the provision of home to school transport.

Other useful information that may help inform your decision about specific schools may include:

- Whether or not the school requires your child to sit a test to gain entry.
- Whether a school uses a system of streaming (placing children in classes based on their ability) and how this operates within the school.
- The range of public examinations taken at schools (eg GCSEs) and their pupils' success in these exams. The courses offered should be economically relevant with clear progression pathways to enable pupils to continue in education or move into training or employment.
- The arrangements schools make for pupils who may require special help.
- The arrangements schools make to provide support to pupils who are not able to keep up with their class in specific subjects.
- Schools' policies on homework, uniform (the cost of school uniforms can vary greatly from school to school), discipline, etc.
- The range of extra-curricular activities available in schools and the cost of these activities.
- School fees (if relevant) and other additional costs (eg are pupils required to participate in certain activities such as particular sports, which also have costs associated with kit etc).
- The opportunities available for pupils to access a broader range of courses through collaborative arrangements the school has with other schools and FE colleges in the area.
- The emphasis the school places on careers provision. What information do you and your child get at each stage to help support the decisions they will be making? How does the school provide preparation for the world of work, including the arrangements for work experience?
- Links the school may have with local businesses or community/voluntary organisations and how these links benefit the pupils.

5. THE POST-PRIMARY CURRICULUM

All publically funded post-primary schools have a statutory duty to deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum. At Key Stage 3 the curriculum is broadly similar across all schools, but at Key Stage 4 schools may offer a wider variety of courses. Under the Entitlement Framework all schools are required to offer access to a minimum of 21 courses at both Key Stage 4 and post-16 including a mixture of both applied courses (with more practical assessment) and general courses (with more written assessment), and all courses should have clear progression pathways. You should feel free to ask any post-primary school about the courses it offers, how it ensures that it meets the needs and aspirations of young people and what advice and support it will provide to help your child make important decisions about course options in the future.

6. PREPARATION FOR ENTRANCE TESTS

Reflecting public support for academic selection to grammar schools, the Department supports the right of those schools wishing to use academic selection as the basis for admission of some or all of their pupils to do so.

All primary schools have statutory obligations to deliver the primary curriculum (as defined in Articles 4-9 of the Education (NI) Order 2006). Primary schools may facilitate entrance test arrangements by supplying support materials, carrying out any preparation for tests during core teaching hours, coaching in exam technique, providing a location for testing where mutually agreed with the test provider, and/or providing familiarisation with a testing environment, consistent with its statutory obligations. Schools are free to exercise this right in line with the wishes of parents and pupils. The Education and Training Inspectorate will continue to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools in the context of the statutory curriculum.

Further information on the Department's position on academic selection may be found in the Department's published post-primary transfer guidance, available to view at the following link: www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/post-primary-transfer-guidance-september-2016

7. OVERSUBSCRIBED SCHOOLS

The information in this leaflet will help you decide which schools you would like your child to attend for a variety of reasons, but you also need to consider the likelihood of your child being able to secure a place at your preferred schools. You should be aware that not all children are accepted to the school of their preference. You need to consider the level of competition for places at the school and the extent to which your child might be able to successfully compete for these places (ie the degree to which your child meets the school's admissions criteria). To assist you in making these judgements it may be helpful for you to have important information about:

- The pattern of applications and admissions to a school in previous years – that is, the number of applications received in each of the previous few years, and the number of applicants actually admitted in those years. Remember that the pattern of applications may change from year to year. **A school that receives fewer applications than it has places available must admit all of those applicants.**
- How schools will select children for admission if they have too many applicants. In this situation schools have to use admissions criteria to choose which children to admit. In deciding whether or not to apply to a school, it may be very helpful to have a good understanding of that school's admissions criteria.
- Whether a school uses an entrance test to determine admissions eligibility. If you seek a place for your child in a grammar school it is very important to include at least one other category of school in your list. If you do not do this it may reduce the possibility of your child being admitted to a school of your preference.

There are a number of ways you can get the information you need to help you decide at which schools to seek a place for your child and these are set out below.

8. INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOLS

The following sections provide advice on sources of information about schools that will help you decide which schools you want to apply to for a place for your child. You should be aware, however, that information about individual schools can change from year to year. This is particularly true of admissions criteria. Therefore, before reaching a final decision about preferred schools you should ensure that you obtain and check the most up-to-date information about your chosen schools in your child's Primary Seven year:

1. EDUCATION AUTHORITY WEBSITE

Up-to-date information on the post-primary admissions process will be published on the Education Authority website (www.eani.org.uk/admissions) by Christmas of your child's Primary Seven year. This will include a 'find a post-primary school' link which you can use to search for schools in your area and view, print or save the admissions criteria for each school; and a link to information on how to apply for school transport and details of qualifying criteria for transport assistance.

So, to make best use of the information available:

- Look up the schools in which you are interested.
- Check how many children each school can admit.

- Check how popular these schools have been in recent years: have they had more applicants than places available? **A school that receives fewer applications than it has places available must admit all of those applicants.**
- Carefully read the admissions criteria for each school you are considering. These admissions criteria will be how a post-primary school will select children for admission if it has more applicants than places.
- Think about how these criteria might apply to your child.
- Think about what information you should provide when completing your child's transfer application.

ii. **SCHOOL PROSPECTUSES**

Every post-primary school is required to produce a prospectus. This is information that:

- provides details about the school and the educational opportunities it can provide for your child; and
- contains information about subject choices available at the school, public examination results, the number of applications received and the number of places granted in past years.

Prospectuses are available from schools' websites and/or in printed format and are free on request.

iii. **OPEN DAYS/NIGHTS**

You should also take the opportunity to visit each of the post-primary schools you are considering by attending their open days/nights. Details of dates and times may be found in local newspapers or obtained directly from schools. During the open day/night the principal will normally explain how their school's admissions criteria operate. You will have the opportunity to see around the school, see examples of pupils' work and talk to teachers and some pupils. You will have the opportunity to do this before you are required to complete the transfer application.

9. **TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS**

The expense and practicality of transporting your child to the schools you are considering may be a major factor in deciding which schools to list on the transfer application. You should give this matter careful consideration and ensure that you understand the rules governing eligibility for transport assistance.

Please note that the rules governing eligibility for transport assistance may alter during your child's time at any particular school and this should be taken into consideration when choosing schools to list as preferences on the transfer application.

Your child will only be eligible for transport assistance in circumstances where he or she:

- enrolls at a school which is further than three miles from their home; **and**
- has been unsuccessful in gaining a place at **all** schools of the same category within that three mile limit. This includes applying to, and being turned down by, schools within the three mile limit where your child clearly does not meet their admissions criteria, before applying to schools of the same category beyond the three mile limit.

For the purposes of qualifying for transport assistance there are six categories of school:

- Controlled or Other Voluntary schools;
- Catholic Maintained schools;
- Integrated schools (including Grant Maintained and Controlled Integrated Schools);
- Irish-medium schools;
- Denominational (ie Catholic) grammar schools; and
- Non-denominational grammar schools.

Schools with separate secondary and grammar streams recognised by the Department of Education (sometimes called bilateral schools) may fall into any of these categories, but for the purposes of transport assistance:

- an application to the secondary stream will be treated as an application to a secondary school in one of the other categories; and
- an application to the grammar stream will be treated as an application to one of the two grammar school categories.

The following schools are recognised as bilateral for the purposes of transport eligibility:

- (i) St Patrick's College, Maghera
- (ii) St Killian's College, Carnlough
- (iii) Holy Cross College, Strabane
- (iv) Slemish College, Ballymena
- (v) Lagan College, Belfast

EXAMPLE

You want your child to attend a particular Integrated school (school A) that is more than three miles from your child's house.

There is another Integrated school (school B) less than three miles from your child's house.

If you apply to school A as your first preference and apply to school B as a lower preference (or do not apply to school B at all), your child will not be eligible for transport assistance to school A.

If you apply to school B as your first preference, do not obtain a place at that school and subsequently obtain a place at your second preference, school A, your child will be eligible for transport assistance to school A.

If you apply to school B as your first preference and are offered a place there but decide to turn it down in favour of the offer of a place in school A, then your child will not be eligible for assistance to school A.

The admissions criteria for each school on the Education Authority website will state the category of school. You should study very carefully the detailed information about transport arrangements on the website. It may be helpful for you to contact the Education Authority to discuss how the possible outcomes of your application to post-primary schools may determine your eligibility for transport assistance. Contact details are provided at the end of this leaflet.

Full details of the home to school transport policy can be found in the DE circular 1996/41.

10. COMPLETING YOUR CHILD'S APPLICATION TO POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Education Authority is introducing online applications. It is envisaged that when the time comes for you to apply in early 2021 you will be able to make an online application for admission to post-primary education in September 2021. The Education Authority will keep you fully informed about how and when to do this.

The information that you submit on or with your application will be the basis upon which your preferred post-primary schools will consider your child's application.

Expressing Your Preference for Post-primary Schools

You will be asked to list in order of preference the schools that you would like your child to attend:

- **You should list at least four schools on the application.** In some circumstances it would be wise to list more than four – for example, where schools tend to get more applications than they have places available and in areas where there are many schools.
- If you do not list at least four schools, this could reduce the possibility of your child being admitted to a school of your preference. **You can list as many schools as you wish.** This may be significant. As preferences are processed, your child, having met the criteria of one of the schools listed as a high preference school on your application, may be displaced by another child later in the process who better meets that school's criteria despite listing the school as a lower preference.
- You should not enter the same school more than once.
- If you seek a place for your child in a grammar school it is very important to include at least one other category of school in your list. If you do not do this it may reduce the possibility of your child being admitted to a school of your preference.
- Please note that a child's place in a grammar school is not guaranteed regardless of their entrance test grade or score therefore it is strongly recommended that a non-grammar school is listed as a preference in all circumstances.

The transfer process is a competitive one and you should be aware that no child can be guaranteed admission to a particular school. Carefully considering your child's preferences and nominating an appropriate number of schools will increase your chances of securing a place for your child at a school of your preference.

The Importance of Providing Relevant Information about Your Child's Application

You will also be asked to provide information about your child when completing the application. This is very important because:

- If one of your chosen schools has more applicants than places available it will have to choose which children to admit.
- A school will do this by applying its admissions criteria to all applicants.
- **The information about your child that you provide when completing the transfer application will be what a school will use to determine how well your child meets its admissions criteria.**

The sort of information that it will be important for you to provide will vary from school to school. It will often be information like:

- Whether your child has any brothers or sisters already attending the schools to which you are applying.
- Whether the child is the eldest child, only child or the eldest boy/girl in the family.
- Whether your child is registered with the Education Authority as being entitled to Free School Meals.
- Transfer exam mark (if one or more of your school choices uses this as one of its admissions criteria).

It is therefore vital that you very carefully read the admissions criteria for each school you decide to list as a preference on your child's application. This will ensure that you understand what information is needed by all the schools you list, and that you provide this information when completing the application.

Free School Meal Entitlement

The Department has recommended that schools use their admissions criteria to make sure that they admit a fair number of children registered as entitled to Free School Meals.

- To make this possible, the transfer application will ask you if your child is currently listed on the Education Authority register of children entitled to Free School Meals.
- If this applies to your child you should record this in the appropriate part of the transfer application.
- Your claim of Free School Meal Entitlement registration will be checked if it is relevant to a school's decision to admit your child.

What happens if my child only becomes registered as entitled to Free School Meals after I have completed his/her transfer application?

In this case, you will have the opportunity to update your child's details up to and including the date which will be specified in the information about the transfer process published on the Education Authority website – see the "Change of Circumstances" section overleaf.

Checking the Transfer Application

Before submitting the transfer application please note:

- You should check all the information carefully before finalising the application. You should ensure that all relevant information is provided when completing the application to enable all the schools you have listed as preferences to consider your child's application. **You and you alone are responsible for ensuring that all relevant information is provided.**
- If you do not provide relevant information you may reduce the chance of your child being admitted to a school of your preference.
- **It is also your responsibility to ensure that the information you provide is correct.** Post-primary schools may be required to verify information provided as part of your child's application and information found to be false can lead to non-admission.

Change of Circumstances after Completion of the Transfer Application

Your personal circumstances may change after you have completed the application. For example:

- Your address may change; or
- Your child may become registered as entitled to Free School Meals.

If your circumstances do change in a way that may be important for the transfer process, you should contact the Education Authority to provide this new information. Contact details are at the end of this leaflet. Additional information can only be accepted up to and including the date that will be specified in the information about the transfer process published on the Education Authority website.

II. WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD IS UNPLACED?

Towards the end of May in your child's Primary Seven year you will be informed of the post-primary school in which your child has been placed.

It is possible that your child may be unsuccessful in gaining admission to any of your preferred post-primary schools. If this is the case you will be advised by the Education Authority at the conclusion of the procedure. At this point you will be informed of schools which have places remaining and you will be asked to nominate additional preferences on your child's behalf for any of these schools. It is important that you respond promptly to the EA as the number of available places may be limited and delaying may mean the school fills up before you have applied.

Information follows on the Independent Admissions Appeal Tribunals and Exceptional Circumstances process. **However it is important to note that securing a place at an alternative school will not affect the outcome of any subsequent appeal or Exceptional Circumstances application.** Therefore parents in this position who wish to appeal or apply for Exceptional Circumstances are strongly encouraged to apply for a place at a school with places remaining in tandem with any appeal or Exceptional Circumstances application.

12. THE INDEPENDENT ADMISSIONS APPEAL TRIBUNALS

If your child does not get a place in a school of your preference and you feel that this is because the school(s) did not apply their admissions criteria correctly, you can appeal to an Independent Admissions Appeal Tribunal. The communication you receive informing you of your child's placement will contain information about your right to appeal and who you should contact if you wish to make an appeal.

13. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

You may believe your child needs to attend a particular post-primary school for reasons other than simply because you prefer that post-primary school. There may be compelling and exceptional reasons why your child should attend a specific post-primary school.

If you feel that this applies in your child's case, you should note that:

- If the school in which your child has been placed is not the post-primary school that he/she needs to attend for compelling and exceptional reasons, you will have the opportunity to apply to have your child's case considered as part of an Exceptional Circumstances process.
- **A claim of Exceptional Circumstances can only be considered after you have applied to the post-primary school through the normal admissions process and have been refused a place.**
- Claims for Exceptional Circumstances can be considered at the same time as, though separately from, admissions appeals.
- You will obtain more detailed information on the Exceptional Circumstances process, including how to apply to have your case considered, when you receive details of your child's placement.

Further information is available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/appealing-school-place-decision

14. EDUCATION AUTHORITY CONTACT DETAILS

Contact details for the Education Authority Post-Primary Admissions Office are provided below.

Education Authority

Post-Primary School Admissions

Ballee Centre

Ballee Road West

BALLYMENA

BT42 2HS

Email: postprimaryadmissions@eani.org.uk

Website: www.eani.org.uk/admissions

**Advice for Parents of Children
in Primary Six**