

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS GUIDE BOOK

Updated 2013 edition

- Introduction to the guide
- How to find the best school
- What is Ofsted?
- The Admissions Code - simplified
- The Equal Preference System
- School admission rules
- Filling in the forms
- Glossary of school terms



The School Admissions Guide

Third edition, 2013

www.SchoolAdmissions.co.uk

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Foreword

“Statistics published by the Department for Education show 15.4% of the nearly 513,000 children who applied to start state secondary schools this September didn't get into the school their parents wanted” (The Guardian, March 2011)

Those are shocking statistics. As a parent you know what school your child will best suit. It is heartbreaking when you are told they have to go somewhere else - especially if it is a school you really don't want them to attend.

This is where School Admissions Guide can help. Minimize the risk of the above happening to you and your child. Know how the system works, know what you should do and shouldn't do to get them into the right school for them.

I have been a member of several school admission appeal panels in a professional capacity, and then later as a mother who has been through the school applications process with my child, I can assure you getting the application right is crucial.

Starting school can be either a traumatic or exciting time for your child. This Guide aims to help you through the admissions process to maximize your child's chance in getting offered the right school for them, and therefore making the transition to school a much less stressful experience for you and your child.

I hope that this guide helps you, and please let me know about your success.



Maria Jones-Fraser

Introduction

In this book we guide you through the school admission application process.

Research really is the most important thing, we can't stress this enough. Therefore the whole first section is all about what research you should do before filling in the application form. Understanding your chances of being offered a place at a particular school is key. It is pointless listing a school as your first preference if you have a slim or no chance of your child getting a place there. We explain the often complicated admissions criteria, and the system used to allocate places. This way you can make educated decisions about the schools you apply to.

Don't forget that our other book - *'Which school is best for YOUR Child?'* covers the different kinds of schools in England and is also available from our website.

The next section is about how to best fill in the application form, and about gathering the right evidence to support your application.

We hope that after you have followed all our advice that you receive good news and your child is offered a place at a school you prefer. However this does not always happen. If you decide to appeal against a decision to not offer your child a school place, please refer to our other companion title to this Guide. *'How to win and not worry at school appeals'* guides you through the appeals process and offers you invaluable hints and tips for your appeal case and the appeal hearing.

Good luck with your application.

Section I

Research, Research, Research

*“If we knew what it was we were doing,
it would not be called research, would it?”
Albert Einstein*

Einstein was right, there is no shame in not knowing where to start. Information is power, and when applying for school places, the more you know about the world of schools the better. The following section explains some important issues that some parents get hung up on. For some parents it's OFSTED reports, others get bogged down with SATs results. Is a school bad if its OFSTED report names it as a “3”.

We explain exactly what everything means, what is important and why.

What is OFSTED?



OFSTED stands for, **OF**ffice for **ST**andards in **ED**ucation.

Many parents place a lot of importance on what OFSTED say about a particular school. This section outlines what OFSTED actually do, and

discusses how important OFSTED reports are in choosing a school for your child.

OFSTED carries out inspections of each school in England. They then publish these results and the report can be read by anyone at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports. Schools have a duty to provide you with their OFSTED report if you request it (they may charge you for photocopying if your child is not at that school).

Inspection judgements

Each school is judged in 2 main categories:

1. Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?
2. The school's capacity for sustained improvement.

What the inspection judgements mean:

Grade	Judgment	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school providing exceptionally well for all its pupils needs.
Grade 2	Good	A school that is good and serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	An inadequate school needing to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. OFSTED inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Schools are also judged in other categories; from pupil attendance and behaviour to the quality of teaching.

Are OFSTED reports a good indication of a school's performance?

A criticism of OFSTED reports is that the inspectors only see a snapshot of what the school is like, and not what it is like on a day to day basis. Under the system before 2005, schools had several months to prepare for an Inspection. This allowed them much more scope in letting the inspectors see what they wanted them to see. It also encouraged much disruption to the school. When I was at school, I remember a huge amount of panic from the staff when OFSTED inspectors were due. Suddenly the school looked very different from what it usually did. This was surely not a good system. The rules are different now, schools tend to get two days notice, and inspectors tend to be on site at the school for two to three days instead of a week.

I must admit, when I was looking at moving house, I looked at all the local schools OFSTED reports and dismissed some houses instantly as the local school had a majority of 3s in its OFSTED report. Looking back, I think this was foolish. I didn't read the reports carefully enough, I just looked at the numbers. I should have looked a bit deeper.

Sometimes a year group can drag down the score of a school. A few badly behaved children can cause chaos, we know that. How the school reacts to situations and manages issues can be so much more important. If a child is happy in primary school, is this more important than whether all the children pass their SATs? All schools have strengths and weaknesses.

If a school has an outstanding report, they tend to sing it from the rooftops, and if the report is poor OFSTED can recommend placing the school into 'Special Measures.'

Special Measures

If a school is judged to be inadequate (in one or more areas) and the inspectors believe it needs additional help to improve, it can be placed into Special Measures. Sometimes this can mean the school receives more support from its local authority, additional funding and resources and more frequent inspections from OFSTED.