

# THE TRANSFER PROCESS TO POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL



## Advice for Parents of Children in Primary Six



January 2026



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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 advice and information to assist when making a decision about which schools to apply to next year. It sets out the main steps in the post-primary transfer process and 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 need to think about when choosing a school for your child; and
- 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. However, 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 process for post-primary school placement. If your child holds a statement the Education Authority (EA) will discuss, with you, a suitable post-primary school placement for your child as part of the review of your child's statement. Therefore, application should not be made via EA Connect. You can contact your local EA Special Education Department for more information or the SEN Helpdesk by phone on 028 9031 7777.

If your child is undergoing statutory assessment, you will still need to apply for a post-primary place.

Further information is available on the following website  
[www.eani.org.uk/parents/admissions/post-primary-admissions-guide](http://www.eani.org.uk/parents/admissions/post-primary-admissions-guide) or  
[www.eani.org.uk/admissions](http://www.eani.org.uk/admissions).

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

This leaflet is published on the Department of Education's website ([www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://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](mailto: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

## **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 EA website by mid-late December 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 the Schools' Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG) tests 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. Applications for Access Arrangements should also be made at the time of registration if required. More details can be found on the SEAG website ( <a href="http://www.seagni.co.uk">www.seagni.co.uk</a> ).
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December	<p>Information about the transfer process, including key dates, will be published on the EA website (<a href="http://www.eani.org.uk/admissions">www.eani.org.uk/admissions</a>).</p> <p>You can use the Search Schools facility to find out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How many places are available at each school; and</li> <li>■ 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.</li> </ul>
January	<p>You can ask any post-primary school to supply you with a free copy of its prospectus. This may be found on the school's website and will contain additional information.</p> <p>Open days/nights are held.</p> <p>Please be aware, some schools will make arrangements for open days/nights earlier than January.</p> <p>Guidance will be available from the EA to help you complete your application.</p> <p>When applying, you will be asked to list, in order of preference, at least four post-primary schools that you would like your child to attend, including at least one non-grammar school.</p>
February	<p>The deadline for applications falls in February, however the exact date will be specified in the information about the transfer process published on the EA website.</p>
From February until the issue of placement notification in May	<p>Your child's application will be processed according to parental preference, with schools applying their admissions criteria based on the information provided.</p>

May	<p>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 e-mail will ask you to nominate other schools drawn from a list of schools with places still available. You will also be advised how you can appeal against an admissions decision.</p>
Within two weeks of placement notification issuing	<p>After you have received a placement notification, you can submit an appeal against an admissions decision. You can submit an appeal from the Tuesday after the date of notification. Parents have the right to an independent appeal tribunal only if they consider that a school has not applied its admissions criteria or has not applied them correctly.</p> <p>Appeals can only be upheld if it can be shown that a child has <b>NOT</b> been admitted because a school's admissions criteria have been applied incorrectly.</p> <p>It is the application of the published criteria rather than the personal circumstances of the appellant which are decisive. It is not the role of the Tribunal to comment on the fairness or otherwise of the published criteria.</p>

### 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; and
- complete your child's transfer application to these schools.

You have the right to express preferences for the schools you would like your son/daughter 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. Each year a small percentage of children transferring will not 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. Before listing the preferences on your child's application, you are advised to carefully consider each school's admissions criteria against your child's particular set of circumstances. 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, after applying the schools' admissions criteria, 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 of your child failing 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; and
- The extent to which your child meets the admissions criteria for each school.

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;
- Pastoral care arrangements at the school;
- Whether a school uses a system of streaming (placing children in classes based on ability) and how this operates within the school;
- The range of public examinations taken at schools (e.g. 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 additional support;
  - 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 (e.g. 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?; and
  - 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 publicly funded post-primary schools have a statutory duty to deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum. At Key Stage 3 (Years 8-10) the curriculum is broadly similar across all schools, while at Key Stage 4 (Years 11-12 when pupils sit GCSEs) 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

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 supporting pupils who wish to sit a test required by those schools who use academic selection can 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](http://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 (i.e. the degree to which your child meets the school's admissions criteria). To assist you in making these decisions 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. Where this happens, 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; and
- If you seek a place for your child in a grammar school, it is very important to include at least one non-grammar 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 find 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 your child's 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:

### **i. Education Authority Website**

Up-to-date information on the post-primary admissions process will be published on the EA website [www.eani.org.uk/admissions](http://www.eani.org.uk/admissions) in December of your child's Primary Seven year. This will include a 'find a 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 available;
- Think about how these criteria apply to your child; and
- Think about what information you need to 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**

Information on how to obtain this information can be found in local newspapers, on respective school websites and on social media platforms.

## **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:

- Enrols 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 means that to be eligible for transport to a school which is further than three miles from your home, you must have applied to any/all schools in the same category that are within three miles of your home, even if you believe that your child does not meet their admissions criteria.

It is important to be aware that where your child is deemed eligible for transport assistance, choosing a further away school could result in having access to fewer or less convenient transport options and the EA is not obliged to create new routes for small numbers of, or individual, pupils. Where your child is deemed eligible for transport assistance, the EA will decide what form of assistance is provided. This may include a bus pass for a dedicated EA or Translink school bus, a Translink pass for use on a public service or a parental payment, which is a contribution towards the cost of alternative arrangements.

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; and
- (vi) Strangford Integrated College, Carrowdore.

The EA has an online eligibility checker on its website which will assist parents' selection of school preferences by showing whether their child would be eligible for home to school transport assistance. This tool can be accessed at

<https://www.eani.org.uk/financial-help/home-to-school-transport/check-transport-eligibility>

## 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 obtain a place, 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 EA 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 EA 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 available to view at the following link:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-199641-home-school-transport>

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

When the time comes for you to apply you will be able to make an online application for admission to post-primary education. The EA will keep

you fully informed about how and when to do this via information on its website and information shared with you by your child's primary school.

It is your responsibility to ensure an application is submitted on time for your child. If you do not make an application within the deadline set then your child may not be considered for a place until the end of the application process, at which point many schools will have filled all of their places.

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 up to 12 preferences on the online transfer application on EA Connect. To list more than 12 schools, contact the EA Post-Primary Admissions Office by e-mail or post. Contact details are provided at the end of this leaflet.** 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. If your child's application is not selected by your first preference school, it will then be considered by your second preference school. This will be repeated until a place has been allocated or until all preferences listed have been exhausted. Places will be allocated to those who best meet the admissions criteria;
- 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 at least one non-grammar school is listed as a preference in all circumstances; and
- Although it is not recommended, some schools use admissions criteria that give priority to applications listing the school as first preference. Therefore, it is important that you are aware of which schools prioritise applications in this way and consider carefully the order of your school preferences.

**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 you provide about your child 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 EA as being entitled to Free School Meals;
- If you list an integrated school(s) as a preference you will need to check carefully its admissions criteria and ensure that you provide the details of your child's community background. If you list an integrated school(s) as a preference, please ensure you complete this section on the application form as this information is required by integrated schools to apply their balance; and
- SEAG Entrance assessment outcome (if one or more of your school preferences 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. Some schools will also require you to provide documents verifying information that you include on your application, for example, confirmation that your child is the eldest child of the family or their address. This information may be needed when you submit your application or later in the process.

## **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 EA 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 EA website – see the "Change of Circumstances" section below.

### **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; and
- **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 EA 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 EA website.

## **11. WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD DOES NOT SECURE A PLACE DURING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS?**

In May of 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 EA 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.**

Therefore, parents in this position who wish to appeal 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 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 where to find information on how to submit an appeal through EA Connect.

## 13. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

You may believe your child needs to attend a particular post-primary school for compelling and exceptional reasons.

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 must attend for compelling and exceptional reasons, you may be able to apply to have your child's case considered as part of the 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**, an admissions appeal; and
- More detailed information about the Exceptional Circumstances process, including how to may be obtained from the website below.

Further information is available at

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/appealing-school-place-decision](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/appealing-school-place-decision).

## 14. EDUCATION AUTHORITY CONTACT DETAILS

Contact details for the EA 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](mailto:postprimaryadmissions@eani.org.uk)

Website: [www.eani.org.uk/admissions](http://www.eani.org.uk/admissions)

Telephone: 028 9047 0177

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