

Your Guide To
**PICKING THE
RIGHT SCHOOL**
For Your SEN Child





By Osezusi Bolodeoku
SENCO M.Ed ACAS BCCS
Educator and SEN Specialist





...Introduction

When I was the head of admission at Standard Bearers School, an inclusive preschool and elementary school for the urban elite in Lagos, I realized the importance of picking the right school for your child. At the time, I interviewed a number of parents who came into the school for enquiry, these parents were from other schools that were bigger and seemed to be more popular.

So why then were they changing schools, one may ask?

Of course this can be attributed to many various reasons from; financial, logistics, change in family dynamics and many other reasons.

However, after some time of being in charge of admissions and having the opportunity to meet as well as interview many prospective parents, I came to realize that parents make one major mistake when picking a school for their child or children.

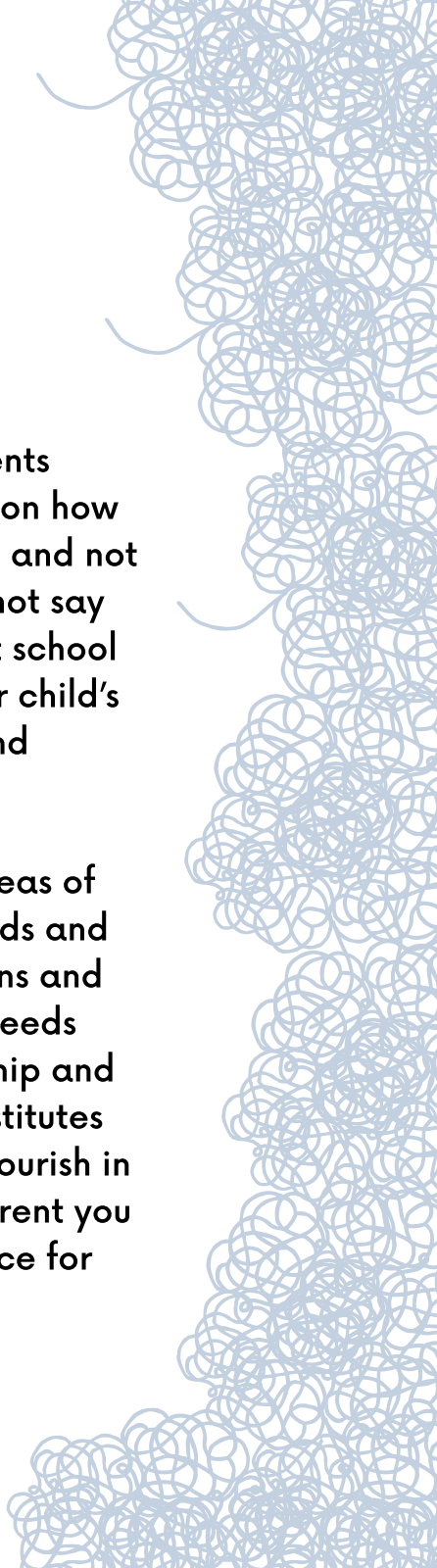
Parents choose schools that fit their social status!





As part of my role, it became pertinent that I educate parents about picking schools based on how well the school fits their child and not their own social status. I cannot say enough how picking the right school increases the chances of your child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual success.

The eBook content itself— areas of educational educational needs and disabilities, pertinent questions and proposed response, special needs provision by school, partnership and benefits of partnership—constitutes what would help your child flourish in school. Knowing that as a parent you have the ability to set the pace for your child to succeed is more empowering.





...Areas of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

The primary areas of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities as identified in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice are:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognitive and learning
- Social, mental and emotional health
- Sensory and/or physical development.

When children are not making expected progress in line with their peers, the class teacher will plan appropriate intervention and support. All children will be observed and assessed regularly in class. Any concerns will be initially discussed with parent/carers as above. Any judgements made in school, may require an outside agency to confirm these. If a child continues to make little progress and is working at a level that is approximately 12 – 24 months below their year group expectation then a child may be identified as having needs in:



Communication and interaction:

Speech/Language Link may be used to assess communication and speech difficulties. A child may also have outside involvement from the Speech and Language team prior to starting school.

Cognitive and Learning:

A judgement should be made by the class teacher and teaching assistant following classroom observations which are recorded on the school's tracking system. The school's tracking system monitors children's progress and attainment regularly throughout the year and highlights children who are not making expected progress. School also use a Lucid cognitive screening assessment to identify aural and visual memory difficulties.

Social, emotional, mental health

These difficulties are recorded when they significantly affect his/her educational progress and are identified through observation and assessment within the classroom.

Physical and/or sensory

These developmental needs may be identified by the class teacher, outside agency or parent and the school follows the advice given to identify the child's needs and offer the necessary support.



Therefore in school shopping for your precious one, you would want to ask the right questions whether it's a special school or a mainstream school practicing inclusion.



...Key questions to ask and responses to expect

QUESTION	ANSWER
My child requires some additional needs, do you practice inclusion?	The school will most likely say... Yes we are an inclusive environment that caters to the needs of all children
Do you have a SEN Code of Practice; that is your policy on how you practice inclusion?	Truth is unfortunately, most schools don't have but they will likely tell you they can only share that with you after the admission process is over. Please continue to ask for their policy.
How will the school respond to my concerns and my child's needs?	The class teacher is the initial point of contact for responding to all parental concerns. If there's a need that my concerns are escalated, the school's leadership that is their head of SEN (if available) and head teacher gets involved.

QUESTION

ANSWER

It is important I know that all staff who will be involved in my child's learning understands his/her needs. How can you assure me of this? (Please tell them what will make you feel reassured about this.)

The school at this point would respond directly to your specific concerns as well as be willing to inform you of a step by step process in a case that such concerns occur;

- Willing to give out the contact details for key staff who would be involved with supporting your child. This person would be your first contact if you have any concerns and would work directly with your SENCo.
- Willing to inform you of the professional trainings the school and staff have had that equips them understand the types of need your child might have? Is any further training planned?

What is the school's policy on bullying (this is key and very important to parents of SEN children)

School should be willing to share their policy on discipline and their ethos. An ethos that promotes, nurtures and encourages empathy and mutual respect would be perfect for inclusion.

QUESTION

ANSWER

How is my child's progress tracked, monitored and what opportunities will there be for me to discuss this?

For this question the school would inform you of their processes on 'Review'. Here's what to expect;

- Parent's consultation meetings at least 3 times per year with the class teacher/ Learning support assistants. This should involve your SENCO as it's a collaborative process.
- A quarterly written report.
- If appropriate, some children may have a home-school book for more regular contact.
- Open door policy as class teachers are available if you wish to discuss your child's progress at any time after school. You will most likely be required to contact the school office to make an appointment.

Will my child be included in activities outside the classroom including school trips?

Since they practice inclusion it is expected that all children have the right to access school clubs, extra-curricular activities and school trips.

If going for a trip, planning and implementation will involve prior consultation with SENCo and parents to compile appropriate risk assessments, suitable access arrangements and additional support if required.

QUESTION

ANSWER

How exactly does the school know how well my child is doing?

The school would share with you their success or progress criteria such as the tracking systems they use to measure achievement against age related expectations and tracks progress at the end of each term. Also the school should share:

- The Curriculum they use which is expected to have year group expectations
- EYFS/SEN – Development Matters
- P scales
- Review of Outcomes from SEN support/provision plans

If they do not utilize all these, they should be willing to work closely with your SENCo to appropriately gauge your child's progress and get the true picture always.

Can my child's shadow (therapist) come with him to school?

Unless the school would be providing one who you must approve of, then the school should allow your personal therapists access.

QUESTION

In a case my child has a physical disability, how conducive and accessible is the school environment?

ANSWER

The school should take you for a tour around their facility. What to look out for;

- Ramps to provide access leading up to main entrance in the building.
- Toilets should be made available with disability access, one with changing facilities

How do you encourage parents to be involved in supporting their SEN child?

The school would go ahead to speak more about their ethos. Their whole school approach in supporting the SEN department by sensitizing the community. Literature and support resources should be made available for parents, as well as periodic workshops should be organized to enlighten parents.

All these should be championed by school resident SENCo or a consultant SENCo.



STEPS TO PROVIDING SPECIAL NEEDS PROVISION BY A SCHOOL

Special need provision is provided in graduated stages:

- Special Educational Needs with support.
- Special Educational Needs with an Educational Health Care Plan.

Special Educational Needs Support

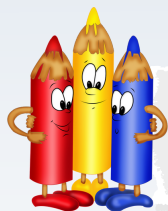
An initial provision for a child should be planned for and delivered by his/her class teacher, teaching assistant and/or year group intervention teacher or assistant using a range of strategies and resources within school.

If child continues to make insufficient progress he or she may receive additional support/assessment from an outside agency following discussion with the SENCo, class teacher, parents and child.

Special Educational Needs Support

If a child continues to work at a level significantly below his/her peers and/or has a diagnosed range of severe complex needs that cannot be met within the schools resources even with High Needs Funding in place then, with parental permission and involvement, a child may be referred for statutory assessment. If successful this may result in a child having an Education and Health Care Plan.





... PARTNERSHIPS

It is important that all stakeholders work together to provide support for the child.

WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP?

Partnership which is synonymous to collaborative, sharing or cooperative could be defined as the working together of two or more persons towards a common goal. Some educational researchers have shared their views on partnership as seen in the Holy Bible cited by Johnson and Johnson, 2017 which demonstrates the strength of partnership in its narrative that two heads are better than one, as one would uplift the other and the capacity of a threefold cord can not be easily broken (Ecclesiastics 4:9-12, cited in Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.2).

Parental partnership with teachers could also be defined as "...parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2007, p.83).

It is imperative that the parent, SENCo and teacher collaborate in partnership to facilitate a "transfer of learning" which is the ability for the child to "make use of previous learning in dealing with new tasks and in new situations" (Kyriacou, 2009, p.32). More so, the SEN Code of Practice emphasizes why such partnership should be encouraged from the benefits of the child.



Indeed, on a much broader view (than it's being used here for SEN children) a symbiotic relationship of SENCo, parents and teachers is highly required for the success of every child, irrespective of whether the child is neurotypical or neuro-diverse, has additional needs or not.

STEPS TO FOSTER PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP:

Before a symbiotic relationship can be established it first has to be initiated by the parent as the concept of parent, SENCo and teacher partnership is built on the premise that the parent is first and foremost the most important influence in the child's development.

Thus in this section, I will begin with the parent's unilateral interest in picking the right choice of school where their SEN child will thrive and flourish. Therefore, it is advised that when school shopping, the parent should carry out their due diligence by considering the below:

- The school Prospectus
- School SEN Policy
- School's Website
- Speak to existing parents of the school to have an unbiased feedback of the environment
- Speak to staff of school
- Ask for qualifications of staff
- Request to see key policies on specific areas of interest, like extra curricular activities, bullying.



Bearing in mind that the choice of school is pivotal in birthing and nurturing greatness in a child, the parent must ensure they pick a school with an ethos suitable for their child.

A good example will be for a parent of a child with learning difficulty to choose a mainstream school that practises inclusion and is well equipped (trained staff, enabling environment and up to date technology) where they incorporate the multisensory method in teaching or a parent of a child with developmental disability to choose a special school that operates an open door policy and is willing to partner for the benefit of the all especially the child.

After all these have been taken into consideration, admission has been granted and the child placed in a class, I suggest the class teacher reaches out to the parent before school resumption date.

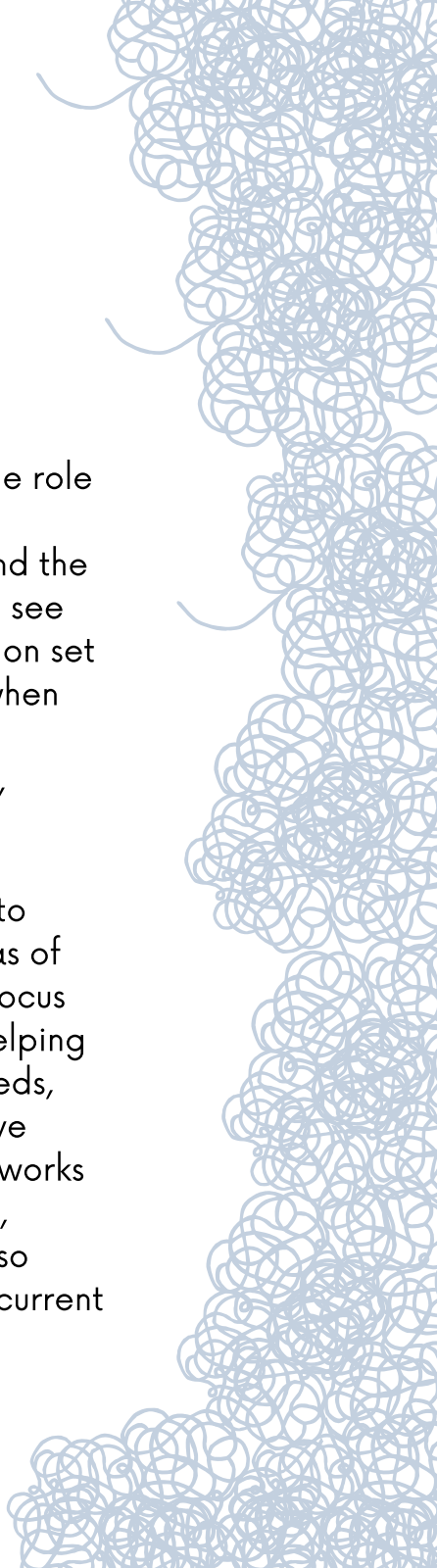
This first meeting (virtual, phone call or face-to-face) will aid in paving the entrance of a positive partnership between the teacher and parent as it will be of utmost benefit to the child's smooth transitioning in the new school environment.





Also, vital to this partnership is the role of open communication as it is believed that both the parent and the teacher share a similar desire to see the child succeed and the common set of goals can only be achieved when there is a synergy between both parties (Swick, Hobson, and Duff, 2017).

One great way for both parties to assist the child is to identify areas of need and potential goals, then focus should be on working towards helping the child strengthen areas of needs, acquire new skills and progressive goals. Whilst teacher/educator works and monitors IEP goals at school, parent on the other hand can also monitor progress on your child's current IEP goals at home.



With an open line of communication, parents can provide teachers with background information about the characteristic, learning style, habits, interest and behaviour of the child.



While in turn parent will learn from teacher another view how their child is relating to other people and making progress in the acquisition of academic, social and life skills.

When the lines of communication are kept open, the parent-teacher relationship should remain a positive one.

An open communication line allows both parties to ask questions; for example, parents who want to support academically but don't know how to go about it, should ask questions like "What can we be doing at home to help our child read, how do you motivate our child in the area of seeing his task through?" Questions like this will bring about what I call "one voice" (see benefits of partnership on child). Open communication can not be over emphasised in this partnership.

Furthermore, keeping goals in mind; an IEP- INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL PLAN will serve as the guideline and an operations memorandum by which this partnership is executed.





Lookout for teachable moments. One of the best ways that parents can assist their teachers is to look for real-world, practical applications of concepts learned in class.

For example, if your child is learning colours in school, have him or her apply that skill by showing him different colours of cars, building or traffic light as you drive back home. If he or she is learning to read, encourage your child to read anything and everything out loud, from menus to newspapers to street signs, and praise his or her efforts and progress.

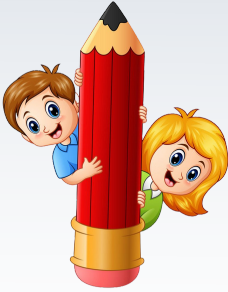
Solidifying academic concepts is all about making learning meaningful to your child. Who better to do that than the parents?

On the other hand, seeing this, the teacher can alter lesson plan when they discover that the child is really struggling with the practical application of a skill by allowing flexibility in their teaching to improve on social skills.

This is perfectly acceptable (and even advisable) that teachers apply flexibility and change a plan or slow down if the child needs it.

Lastly, it is important that the parent promotes a love relationship between the child and the teacher. Most young children develop a love relationship with their teachers when they like the teacher (Thompson, 2016).





BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP ON CHILD

Vygotsky's theory promotes that to create the 'zone of proximal development (ZPD)'- the dynamic region in which children acquire cognitive, social competence and the capacity to guide behaviour through problem solving- children and the important adults in their lives (parents and teachers) must collaborate (Vygotsky, 1978).

I will liken this statement to mean that it is imperative that teachers and parent adapt what I call "one voice" which simply means having same opinion, same goal, or in agreement.

Through this perspective, I will divide this section into five parts that encompasses the physical, social, emotional, intellectual and creative development in producing a healthy, broadminded, independent, intelligent and self-confidence child.



Benefits on the physical development

1. Parent-SENCo-teacher partnership would help promote the healthful development of the child as through an open line of communication, SENCo can easily advice parents and school of new research findings on diet and physical care to manage effect of difficulty or disability as the case may be.
2. Also through mutual involvement of all partners, there can be a map out plan of physical activities that will be highly beneficial to the child's physical development.

Example: Parents of a child with dyspraxia can be advised by the SENCo to reinforce physical activities that would help strengthen his pencil grip. As well as explore other creative interest based on his activities of their day with him.

Benefits on the social development

1. When parents, SENCo and teacher partner to explore and encourage seemingly ordinary pursuits like conversation, pretend-play, homework, shopping excursion and even bedtime story, they through this help the child acquire;
 - Wide-ranging knowledge about their physical and social worlds.
 - Ways of relating to other people.
 - Strategies for surmounting challenges.
 - A sense of family and community belonging
2. Parents-SENCo- teacher partnership helps the child to develop a set of positive social behaviour, that will enable the child to participate effectively in different settings (school, home or social gathering)



3. Also as the child grows from childhood to adolescent the continued partnership of the parents, SENCo with the teachers (school at large) will ensure that positive social habits are formed which helps the child cultivate a sound self –social development. Example: When parents, SENCo and teachers incorporate modelling technique as a treatment to help a child with anxiety disorder. All parties by constantly modelling themselves demonstrate a non-fearful or appropriate behaviour in a feared situation will promote and encourage child to imitation their behaviour (Davis 111 et al., 2017).

Benefits on the emotional development

1. Parent-SENCo-teacher partnership provides emotional guidance through an agreed structured daily plan that is appropriate for the developmental stage of the child.
2. Provides the child with emotional support like love, attention and concern about the interest.
3. The child develops healthy emotion that has been modelled by all partners.
4. Also, partnership promotes positive mental health in the child.

Example: Everything responds to love, thus a child on the autistic spectrum would blossom and flourish from an awareness that comes from a place of emotional security.

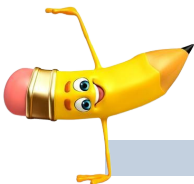





Benefits on the intellectual development

1. There is a tremendous positive effect on the cognitive ability of the child when parents, SENCo and teachers begin to use “one voice” in their instructional methods.
2. They can agree in choosing an enabling setting that would help make learning more fun for the child.

Example: On the advice of the SENCo, the parent and teacher (school) of a SEN child in a mainstream school that uses EYFS curriculum can decide a blended curriculum where they can apply the Montessori Curriculum through its resources would be more effective for the child.



The background is a solid blue sky with several white, fluffy clouds scattered throughout. At the bottom of the image, there is a row of colorful houses in various styles and colors, including green, yellow, orange, and red. A white dashed line runs horizontally across the bottom of the houses, suggesting a road or sidewalk.

Partnership is of utmost
benefit to your child and all
the stakeholders involved.



References:

1. Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years. Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities, January 2015
2. Ecclesiastics 4:9-12, cited in Johnson and Johnson, 2017, p.2.
3. Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The Relationship between Parental Involvement and Urban Secondary School Student Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis, P.2
4. Kyriacou, C. (2009). Effective teaching in schools. Theory and practice (3rd ed.). Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd, P.32
5. Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, 1978



Hi my name is Osezusi Bolodeoku a Special Educational Needs Expert, Board Certified Cognitive Specialist, Advanced Certified Autism Specialist and the Creative Director of FOS Creative Studio and SEN Centre.. I would love to hear from you and connect with you. Just tap on my cutesy face and let the magic begin...lol

