Secondary School Transition Guide

For Parents and Carers of Autistic Children in Barking and Dagenham

Helping you plan, prepare and feel supported every step of the way

Plan	Prepare	Feel supported

Welcome

About this guide and about us

About this guide

This guide has been created by Sycamore Trust UK to help parents and carers of autistic children prepare for the move to secondary school. It covers timelines, practical planning, Barking and Dagenham-specific support, and strategies to help your child thrive.

About Sycamore Trust UK

We are a charity based in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, supporting autistic adults, children and young people and their families across Barking & Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge. We offer practical guidance, emotional wellbeing support, and community connection.

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A note on this guide

Information in this guide is based on the SEND Code of Practice and Barking and Dagenham information available in September 2026. Dates are given for a typical school year. Always check the latest dates with Barking and Dagenham Council and your child's school.

1 Understanding the transition

Why transition can feel different for autistic children

Moving from primary to secondary school is a big change for any child. For autistic young people, it can bring a unique set of challenges — but with the right planning, it can also be an exciting new chapter.

Common challenges autistic young people may face

New environment

A larger building, new classrooms, different layouts and sensory environments to navigate.

More teachers

Moving from one or a few key adults to many different teachers across the day.

Social complexity

Bigger year groups, different friendship groups, unwritten social rules.

Changes in routine

Timetables that change, different lesson structures, lunchtimes with less structure.

Sensory demands

Louder corridors, busier dining halls, changing rooms, more movement and noise.

Independence

Greater expectation to manage belongings, homework planners, and travel independently.

Remember: you know your child best

Every autistic child is different. Use this guide as a starting point and adapt it to your child's specific strengths, interests, and support needs. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach.

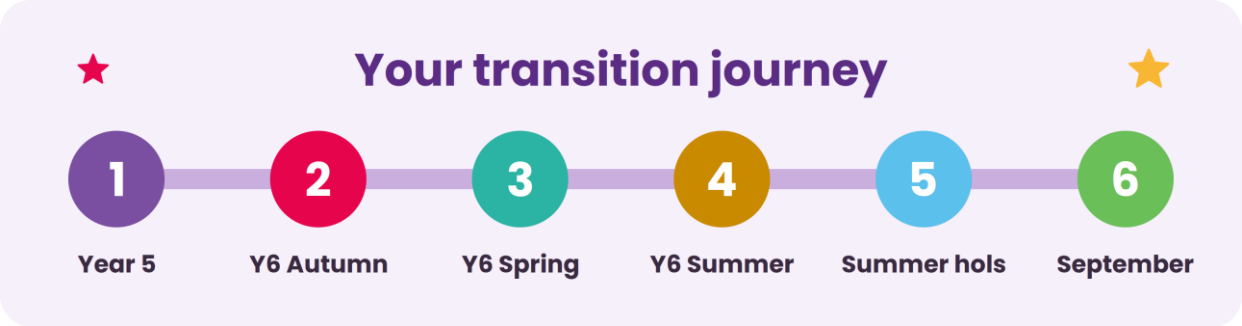
What helps most

- Preparation that starts early — ideally in Year 5 or early Year 6
- Visiting the school multiple times before September
- A key named adult your child can go to at the new school
- Open communication between you, your child, and both schools
- Consistent information shared with all staff who will support your child
- Acknowledging your child's worries and making a plan together

2 Your transition timeline

What to do and when

Use this timeline as a guide. If you are starting later, do not worry — begin wherever you are and focus on the steps ahead.



1

Year 5

Year 5 (age 9–10) — Early planning

- Start thinking about secondary school options, including mainstream schools, schools with resourced provision, and special schools in Barking and Dagenham.
- If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), use the Year 5 annual review to start planning for secondary school and request updates to the plan if needed.
- Talk to your child's primary school SENDCo about transition planning.
- Begin visiting schools informally — open evenings, school websites and virtual tours. It may help not to take your child the first time, so that you can ask questions and take your time.
- Note any sensory, emotional or academic support your child currently receives that will need to continue.

2

Y6 Autumn

Year 6, Autumn term (September–December)

- Attend secondary school open evenings — ideally with your child if they are ready.
- Ask whether the secondary school has autism-trained staff and what its SEND provision looks like. If possible, speak to the school SENDCo or arrange an appointment.
- **Apply for a secondary school place by 31 October** through the eAdmissions portal. See Barking and Dagenham: moving to secondary school.
- **If your child has an EHCP:** tell the Barking and Dagenham SEND team which schools, you would like to be considered as early as possible. The Local Authority must consult the schools and, **by 15 February**, issue the final amended EHCP naming a secondary school.
- Request a meeting with your child's current SENDCo to begin drafting a transition plan.

3

Y6 Spring

Year 6, Spring term (January–April)

- **15 February:** deadline for the final amended EHCP naming your child's secondary school.
- **1 March (National Offer Day):** secondary school offers are sent to families who applied through admissions. (If 1 March falls at a weekend, offers go out on the next working day.)
- If your child has an EHCP and you disagree with the school named, you can appeal to the SEND Tribunal. See Section 5.
- Contact the named SENDCo at the new secondary school as soon as a place is confirmed.
- Request an early transition visit or meeting — do not wait for the standard Year 6 transition day.
- Begin talking with your child about the new school — look at the school website, maps and photos together.

4

Y6 Summer

Year 6, Summer term (May–July)

- Arrange multiple visits to the secondary school before the end of term, if possible.
- Create a visual transition resource for your child (see Section 4 for ideas).
- Share a detailed profile or 'All About Me' document with the new school's SENDCo.
- Attend any transition events organised by the secondary school — and ask if additional visits can be arranged.
- Contact the new school's pastoral team or Head of Year to introduce yourself.
- If your child has an EHCP, check that the support in the final plan is ready to start in September.
- Apply for home to school travel assistance if your child is eligible. Applications can take up to 4 weeks to process, so apply as early as you can. See Special educational needs travel assistance.

5

Holidays

Summer holidays

- Keep some routine during the holidays — this can reduce anxiety about the new term.
- Practise the journey to school (bus routes, walking routes) several times.
- Visit the school building if the school permits it during the holidays.
- Prepare uniform and equipment together — let your child be involved in choices where possible.
- Use social stories, visual schedules or role-play to rehearse situations like lunchtime, moving between lessons, and finding their locker.

6

September

September — The first weeks

- Check in regularly with the school, especially in the first half term.
- Have a named contact at the school you can email or call if concerns arise.
- Monitor your child's mood at home — they may mask at school but show distress at home.
- Review any support arrangements after the first half term.
- Support your child with their timetable and with managing what they need for each day, for example using visual schedules.
- Celebrate small wins with your child!

3 Choosing the right school

Understanding your options in Barking & Dagenham

Barking and Dagenham has a range of secondary school options. The right school depends on your child's needs, their EHCP (if they have one), and what level of support will help them thrive.

Mainstream secondary schools

Most autistic young people attend mainstream secondary schools. Every school must have a SENDCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator). Key questions to ask:

Questions to ask on your visit

- Do you have a designated space for pupils who need time to decompress (e.g. a quiet room)?
- Can you offer a time-out pass or a 'jump the queue' pass at lunchtime if my child needs these reasonable adjustments?
- Do you offer an alternative place to eat lunch if children cannot cope in the main dining hall?
- What training have your staff received on autism?
- How do you communicate with parents about SEND needs?
- What is your approach to sensory needs (noise, light, smell, physical environment)?
- Do you offer any lunchtime or break time support for pupils who find unstructured time difficult?
- Who is the named SENDCo and how accessible are they to parents?

Mainstream schools with resourced provision

Some mainstream secondary schools in Barking and Dagenham have an 'additionally resourced provision' (ARP). These offer a specialist base within a mainstream school, with specialist support alongside access to the wider school community. Places are usually allocated through an EHCP. The Local Offer currently lists these secondary ARPs. Provision changes over time, so check the latest list on the Local Offer.

School	ARP specialism
Barking Abbey School	Autism or complex social communication; complex learning needs
Eastbrook School	Autism or complex social communication; speech, language and communication needs
Jo Richardson Community School	Autism or complex social communication
Sydney Russell School	Autism or complex social communication
Warren School	Complex learning needs
Dagenham Park Church of England School	Moderate learning difficulties
Eastbury Community School	Deaf and hearing impairment

Special schools

For some autistic young people, a special school may be the right environment. In Barking and Dagenham, these include:

School	Description	Website
Riverside Bridge School	A special free school in Barking for pupils aged 4–19 with autism, speech, language and communication needs, and moderate to profound learning difficulties.	riversidebridge.com
Trinity School	A community special school in Dagenham for pupils aged 3–19 with autism, severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties.	Trinity School
Oxlow Bridge School	A special free school in Dagenham for pupils aged 3–19 with severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Opened in September 2025.	oxlowbridge.com
Pathways School	A special free school in Dagenham for pupils aged 6–19 with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, speech, language and communication needs, and moderate learning difficulties.	pathways.ekotrust.org.uk
Hopewell School	An independent special school in Dagenham for pupils aged 5–19 with autism, moderate learning difficulties and SEMH needs. All pupils have an EHCP.	Hopewell School – Restoring Hope, Releasing potential, Rebuilding Lives

Alternative provision: Erkenwald

The **Erkenwald campus** of Mayesbrook Park School is an alternative provision (not a special school) for up to 30 students aged 11–16 who are struggling to attend mainstream school because of emotional and mental health difficulties. It aims to help young people return to mainstream school or move on successfully to post-16 options.

Mayesbrook Park School – Erkenwald campus

Please note

A place at a special school requires an EHCP. The Local Authority makes the final decision on placement, though you have the right to express a preference. Every school should be visited, and the right choice depends on your individual child.

Barking and Dagenham SEND Local Offer: localoffer.lbbd.gov.uk

4 Preparing your child for transition

Practical strategies to support your child

Start conversations early

Autistic young people often do better with transitions when they have time to process information, ask questions, and raise worries at their own pace. Begin talking about secondary school gently and early — without pressure.

- Use your child's preferred communication style (verbal, written, signing, visual, through play or interest-based chat).
- Be honest but calm — avoid minimising concerns or over-reassuring.
- Ask open questions: 'Is there anything you want to know about the new school?'
- If your child says they are not worried, that is fine too — not every child experiences anxiety.

Create a visual resource about the new school

A personalised transition booklet or social story about the new school can really help autistic young people process the change. Include:

What to include	Details
Photos of the school	Main entrance, corridors, toilets, canteen, the library, and the SEND room or quiet space.
Map of the school	A simple layout showing where key rooms are and how to get from one to another.
Key people	Photos and names of their form tutor, SENDCo, Head of Year, and any key pastoral staff.
A sample timetable	What a typical day looks like — including break and lunch arrangements.
School rules and expectations	Uniform, equipment needed, homework, phone policy.
Travel information	Route to school, which bus or walking route, who they might travel with.

Ask the new school to help you gather this information. Many schools are happy to provide photos or even create a short video tour for autistic pupils.

Plan extra visits

The standard Year 6 transition day is rarely enough for autistic children. Request additional visits, ideally during term time when the school is in normal operation. Aim for:

A quiet first visit

Perhaps after school or during a less busy time.

Walk the timetable

Walk the timetable route and locate key rooms.

Meet key staff

Meet the named SENDCo or key worker who will support your child.

A busy-time visit

If possible, visit at lunchtime so your child can experience the sensory environment.

Create an 'All About Me' document

Share a document with the new school that gives teachers practical, useful information about your child. Include:

- Their strengths, interests, and what motivates them
- Things that are hard for them and practical strategies that help
- Sensory sensitivities and what accommodations make a difference
- Signs that they are becoming anxious or overwhelmed (even if they mask at school)
- How they prefer to communicate with adults
- Any medical needs, diagnoses, or additional considerations
- What a 'good day' looks like — and what a 'hard day' looks like

> **Tip: involve your child**
>
> Where possible, involve your child in creating their 'All About Me' document. Many young people feel proud to share their interests and find it empowering to have a say in how their needs are communicated to new staff.

Practise new routines

In the weeks before September, build in practice for the new routines your child will experience:

- The journey to school — walk, bus, or cycle it together several times.
- Getting up earlier if the school day starts at a different time.
- Packing a school bag with everything needed (consider a laminated checklist).
- Using a planner or homework diary.
- Eating in a new environment — if possible, try canteen-style eating somewhere.
- Independence skills: asking a teacher a question, finding the toilet in a new place.

5 EHCPs and your legal rights

Education, Health and Care Plans

If your child has an EHCP, there are specific legal protections and processes in place for their transition to secondary school. Here is what you need to know.

The annual review before secondary school

The annual review before your child moves to secondary school is a particularly important meeting. It should:

- Review all sections of the EHCP to make sure they still accurately reflect your child's needs.
- Ideally take place in the **autumn term of Year 6**, or at the annual review if it is due before the autumn term so that changes can be made and school consultations completed in time for the 15 February deadline.
- Plan for the move, so that **Section F** (special educational provision) describes the support your child will need at secondary school.
- Record your preferred secondary school. The school is named in **Section I** of the plan.

Key dates and facts for EHCP transfers

- **15 February** in Year 6: the Local Authority must issue the final amended EHCP naming a secondary school.
- If you disagree with the school named or the content of the plan, you can appeal to the **SEND Tribunal**. You must usually contact a mediation adviser first, but this is **not** needed if you are only appealing the school named.
- You have **two months** from the date of the decision letter, or **one month** from receiving a mediation certificate (whichever is later), to register an appeal.
- Find out more: First-tier Tribunal (SEND) on GOV.UK

Your rights

Your right	What this means
Express a preference	You have the right to ask for a particular school to be named, including a mainstream school, a school with resourced provision, or a special school.
Ask for an early review	You can ask for the EHCP to be reviewed early if your child's needs change significantly.
See all reports	You are entitled to see any professional reports or advice submitted as part of the EHCP process.
Take part in meetings	You have the right to be involved in planning meetings and to bring someone to support you.
Appeal decisions	If you disagree with the Local Authority's decision, you can use mediation and/or appeal to the SEND Tribunal.

Your right	What this means
Independent support	You can get free, confidential and impartial help from Barking and Dagenham SENDIASS.

If your child does not have an EHCP

Your child's school still has a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for them under the Equality Act 2010. Speak to the school SENDCo about what support can be put in place through the school's own SEND provision (called **SEN Support**). You can also ask the Local Authority to carry out an **EHC needs assessment** if you feel your child's needs are not being met.

Barking and Dagenham SENDIASS

SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service) offers free, impartial advice to parents of children with SEND in Barking and Dagenham. It is run by Carers of Barking and Dagenham.

Tel: 020 8593 4422 | carerscentre.org.uk/iassinfo
EHCP information from the council: Local Offer – EHC needs assessments and plans

6 Working with the secondary school

Building a strong partnership

A positive, open relationship with your child's secondary school is one of the most important things you can build. Here is how to get started.

Key people to know

Person	Their role
SENDCo	The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator — your main contact for all SEND-related matters. Ask for their name and direct contact details as early as possible.
Head of Year	Responsible for pastoral support for your child's year group. A good contact if concerns arise about wellbeing or social issues.
Form tutor	Your child's daily contact — often the first person to notice changes in mood or behaviour.
Teaching Assistants	May provide in-class or small-group support. Ask if your child will have a consistent TA if this would help.
SEND Governor	The school governor with oversight of SEND provision. Useful to know about if issues escalate.

Communication tips

- Introduce yourself to the SENDCo by email before your child starts — attach your child's 'All About Me' document.
- Ask how the school prefers to communicate with parents about SEND concerns.
- Keep a log of all key conversations, decisions, and commitments made by the school.
- If you have concerns, raise them early and in writing (email is best — it creates a record).
- Ask for a meeting after the first half term to review how things are going.
- Be specific when reporting concerns: 'My child is coming home distressed every Tuesday lunchtime' is more useful than 'they are finding school hard'.

Reasonable adjustments to ask for

Schools must make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils, including many autistic pupils, without needing an EHCP. These might include:

- A named safe adult your child can go to if they are overwhelmed
- Access to a quiet space at lunchtime or break
- Permission to leave lessons a few minutes early to avoid crowded corridors
- A written or visual timetable
- Advance notice of any changes to routine, supply teachers, or trips
- Seating that takes account of sensory needs (near the door, away from windows, etc.)
- Exam access arrangements, such as extra time or a separate room (these need evidence and assessment — ask early)
- A homework planner and agreed expectations around completion
- Flexibility around uniform if sensory sensitivities are a factor

7 Supporting emotional wellbeing

Understanding and managing anxiety

Transition anxiety is very common for autistic young people. It often shows up differently than you might expect — and can continue for weeks or months after the move.

Signs your child may be struggling

- Physical complaints: headaches, stomach aches, tiredness — especially on school mornings
- Meltdowns or shutdowns at home after school (sometimes called 'after-school restraint collapse')
- Increased rigidity around routines at home
- Withdrawal from activities they usually enjoy
- Refusal to go to school or persistent reluctance
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in eating
- Talking a lot about school worries — or refusing to talk about school at all

What helps at home

- Create a calm, low-demand time when your child comes home from school.
- Avoid asking lots of questions about school straight away — let them decompress first.
- Keep home routines consistent — predictability is regulating.
- Acknowledge their feelings without trying to fix them immediately.
- Help them find a 'safe thing' they enjoy at home that marks the end of the school day.
- Use visual schedules at home if moving between activities is difficult.
- Celebrate small positives without minimising difficulties.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

If your child is finding it very difficult to attend school due to anxiety, this may be described as EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance). This is not 'school refusal' — it is a sign that your child is struggling and needs additional support. Speak to the school SENDCo and your GP if this is happening. Sycamore Trust UK has experience supporting families navigating EBSA.

When to seek additional support

Consider seeking additional help if your child:

- Has not settled after the first half term
- Is regularly refusing to attend school
- Is showing signs of significant anxiety, low mood or self-harm
- Has experienced bullying or friendship difficulties

You can seek support via your child's GP, the school SENDCo, CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, usually by referral), or organisations such as Sycamore Trust UK.

Barking and Dagenham CAMHS (NELFT): nelft.nhs.uk/barking-and-dagenham-camhs
YoungMinds Parents Helpline (0808 802 5544): youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline

If your child is in immediate danger, call 999.

8 Looking after yourself

You matter too

Supporting a child through a major transition is emotionally and practically demanding. It is completely normal to feel worried, exhausted, or overwhelmed. Looking after your own wellbeing is not a luxury — it is essential for you to be able to support your child.

Common feelings parents experience during transition

- Anxiety about whether the new school will truly understand and support your child
- Grief for the familiar primary school where your child was known and settled
- Worry about your child's social life, friendships, and whether they will be happy
- Frustration with systems, delays or a lack of information from schools or the Local Authority
- Exhaustion from the amount of planning, advocating and managing that falls on parents

All these feelings are valid. You are not alone.

Connect

Connect with other parents of autistic children — peer support is powerful.

Delegate

Ask school staff, the other parent, grandparents or trusted friends to share the load.

Set boundaries

Give yourself a set 'school worry time' and protect the rest of your day.

Reach out

Contact Sycamore Trust UK for signposting to carer support groups and resources.

Parental burnout

Parental burnout is a recognised experience that many parents of autistic children face — it is the result of long-term stress from caring responsibilities. If you are feeling completely depleted, detached, or overwhelmed, please reach out for support. Speaking to your GP or a carer support organisation is a good first step.

Carers of Barking and Dagenham: carerscentre.org.uk
JUST SAY (Barking and Dagenham parent carer forum): justsayforum.online

9 Parent checklists

Your step-by-step checklists

Use these checklists to track your progress. Tick each item as you complete it.

Before February — Planning and applications

- ☐ Requested copies of all reports and the current EHCP (if applicable)
- ☐ Booked the annual review and asked for transition planning to be included
- ☐ Researched secondary school options in Barking and Dagenham
- ☐ Attended school open evenings (with or without your child)
- ☐ Applied for secondary school places via the eAdmissions portal by 31 October
- ☐ Told the SEND team your preferred school (if your child has an EHCP)
- ☐ Contacted Barking and Dagenham SENDIASS if you need advice on the EHCP process

March–April — Confirmed placement

- ☐ Received the school offer (1 March) or final amended EHCP naming the school (by 15 February)
- ☐ Contacted the named SENDCo at the new secondary school
- ☐ Requested an early transition meeting before the standard Year 6 day
- ☐ Started gathering photos and information for your child's transition booklet
- ☐ Begun talking to your child about the new school regularly
- ☐ Asked about the school's SEND provision and any specific autism support
- ☐ Explored whether your child needs any exam access arrangements (and begun assessment)

May–July — Final preparation

- ☐ Completed your child's 'All About Me' document
- ☐ Shared the 'All About Me' document with the new school SENDCo

☐	Arranged at least one additional visit to the new school beyond transition day
☐	Created or ordered a transition booklet or social story for your child
☐	Practised the journey to school together
☐	Met the SENDCo and/or key pastoral staff at the new school
☐	Confirmed what support will be in place from day one
☐	Prepared uniform and equipment — with your child's involvement
☐	Applied for SEN travel assistance, if eligible

Summer holidays and September — Final steps	
☐	Kept some daily routine during the summer
☐	Practised the journey to school at least 2–3 times
☐	Visited the school building if permitted
☐	Prepared a morning routine checklist for your child
☐	Identified a 'plan B' for difficult mornings (who to call, what to do)
☐	Arranged a check-in with the school for the end of the first half term
☐	Made sure your child has a way to contact you if they are struggling during the day

10 Key contacts and resources

Who to contact in Barking and Dagenham and nationally

In Barking and Dagenham

Organisation	How they can help	Website and contact
Barking and Dagenham SEND (EHC) Team	EHCP queries, annual reviews and school placements.	Local Offer – EHC plans 020 8227 2400 | ehcenquiries@lbbd.gov.uk
Barking and Dagenham SENDIASS	Free, impartial advice and support for parents of children with SEND.	carerscentre.org.uk/iassinfo 020 8593 4422 | carers@carerscentre.org.uk
Barking and Dagenham School Admissions	Secondary school applications and transfer queries.	lbbd.gov.uk – School admissions 020 8215 3004
SEN Travel Assistance	Help with travel to school for eligible pupils with SEND.	lbbd.gov.uk – SEN travel assistance transport.request@lbbd.gov.uk
Barking and Dagenham SEND Local Offer	Directory of SEND services in Barking and Dagenham.	localoffer.lbbd.gov.uk
Children & Young People Disability Hub	Information, advice and early help for families of disabled children aged 0–17.	lbbd.gov.uk – Disability Hub
Barking and Dagenham CAMHS (NELFT)	Mental health support for children and young people, usually by referral.	nelft.nhs.uk/barking-and-dagenham-camhs
JUST SAY Parent Carer Forum	Barking and Dagenham's parent carer forum.	justsayforum.online 07936 851199
Sycamore Trust UK	Support for autistic children, young people and families.	Home - Sycamore Trust 020 8517 9317

National organisations

Organisation	How they can help	Website and contact
National Autistic Society	Information, advice and support on all aspects of autism, including education.	autism.org.uk
IPSEA	Free, legally based advice for families on SEND law and EHCPs. Advice line appointments are booked online.	ipsea.org.uk
Contact	For families with disabled children — information, support and community.	contact.org.uk Helpline: 0808 808 3555
YoungMinds	Mental health support for young people and parents.	youngminds.org.uk Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544

How Sycamore Trust UK can help

We offer advice and support, parent workshops, peer support groups, and one-to-one guidance for families of autistic children in Barking & Dagenham. If you are navigating this transition and would like to speak to someone, please get in touch.

020 8517 9317 | Home - Sycamore Trust

Thank you for reading

Sycamore Trust UK is a registered charity supporting autistic children, young people, adults and their families across Barking & Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

Call us	Visit us	Find us online
020 8517 9317	27–29 Woodward Road, Dagenham RM9 4SJ	Home - Sycamore Trust

Disclaimer

This guide gives **general information only**. It does not replace professional or legal advice from a solicitor, SENDIASS adviser, school, doctor or other qualified adviser. For advice about your child's individual situation, please contact Barking and Dagenham SENDIASS or IPSEA.

Dates and deadlines are based on the SEND Code of Practice and Barking and Dagenham admissions information checked in **September 2026**. They can change from year to year, so please always check them with Barking and Dagenham Council and your child's school.

School and provision details are included to help families explore their options and do not mean that Sycamore Trust UK recommends any particular school. Links to external websites are provided for information. Sycamore Trust UK is not responsible for their content or availability and cannot accept responsibility for any loss or harm arising from the use of this guide.