

DISAPPOINTED WITH YOUR SCHOOL PLACE?

Talk with our appeals service and school consultants

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THE
GOOD
SCHOOLS
GUIDE

SECONDARY SCHOOLS NATIONAL OFFER DAY 2021

Discovering that your child has been offered a place at a school which you don't want can be very disappointing.

However, there are steps you can take to challenge the decision which can, on occasions, result in a place at a school you prefer.

The bad news is it can be a lengthy and nerve-racking process. The chances of gaining a place at a school you have chosen varies according to location. In some local authorities every child gets a place at one of the top three schools listed on their application, while in others, they don't

even get their sixth choice. But whether you have been offered your second choice or none of your choices, you are entitled to appeal to a school that you would prefer



For parents who are disappointed with their child's school offer but uncertain what to do next, *The Good Schools Guide* recommends the following:

Try not to be too dismissive in front of your child about the school you have been offered. In the worst case scenario, that will be the school they go to in September and it would be easier for them not to start off thinking it's a disaster zone.

Get on the waiting lists for other schools you prefer. You can do this immediately for schools which you put on your original application. After the second round offers in April (when schools give out places made available due to others turning them down) you can then get on the waiting lists for any other schools you like the look of. There is quite a shake out between now and September which can result in places becoming available, so don't give up hope.

It may go against your instincts but accept the place your child has been offered. However determined you are to find an alternative, if you don't accept this initial offer, you run the risk of your child having no school to go to in September.

Take a moment to check out the school in greater detail. It might be better than you fear. Even if the local reputation of the school is bad, that could be based on out-of-date information. Look at its most recent Ofsted report. Check out last year's public exam results. You could even speak to parents at the school gate.

It is your legal right to appeal to any of the schools on your original application. This is designed to be a lay process where parents represent themselves, and there is no need for a solicitor. *The Good Schools Guide* offers a school appeals service which can advise you on how to present your case.



Lodging your school appeal

You can appeal to all the schools you named on your preference form, or if you were offered your third choice, for example, you can just appeal to the two you prefer. There's nothing to lose by appealing to all of them. Hearings are currently online and take place over a couple of months, so you can always drop out of later ones if you get offered a place you are happy with. Along with your school place offer you should receive paperwork giving details of how to appeal to each school you selected. Pay close attention to the procedures and deadlines, as these will vary for each school according to whether appeals are being handled by your Local Education Authority or the school's own panel.

In the first instance it is fine to lodge your case simply with a brief outline of your grounds for appeal. You need to back this up with documentary evidence by the deadline given.

Grounds for school appeal

Places at a school can be granted on appeal in two circumstances: 1) When a school or authority has applied its admissions procedures incorrectly, or 2) When the harm done to your child by not getting a place there will be greater than that caused to all the other children by overcrowding.

Check the school website for admissions criteria: to win a case under point 1 you would need to show, for example, that the school gives priority to siblings, but your child was not awarded a place despite having an elder sibling at the school. In reality, it is rare for a school or authority to make this kind of mistake. So you are more likely to be appealing on the grounds of potential harm to your child. You need to explain the reasons why not gaining a place at the preferred school would harm your child (eg academic reasons/transport issues/family circumstances/health or special needs



concerns). You are asked to show that you have an exceptional case – so, for example a long bus journey is not good grounds if plenty of other children have the same journey to school, but a journey which could involve three mis-timed connections might be.

Our appeals advisors can assess your case and tell you if we think you have no chance. But we have seen families win appeals on myriad grounds, and in most cases it is at least worth a try. You must stick to the truth, though, as you will be questioned at the hearing.

Appeal hearings

Hearings usually take place in May or June, although they can start earlier when there is a large number pending. You should receive a letter from the admissions authority at least 10 school days before the hearing date.

A hearing usually lasts around 30 minutes, but there is no clock ticking and you won't be rushed out before you've said all you need to. You need to write out and rehearse your case. You might be too emotional to do it off the cuff on the day. And cut it to the bone. One appeals advisor told us that the biggest mistake parents make is boring the panel with irrelevant detail.

You will be questioned by the panel, and possibly the school's representative. They will usually treat you kindly, but they are looking for holes in your case; parents often report that the questioning has been quite tough.

It isn't compulsory to attend – the panel will consider your case on the documents alone if you don't – but it would be unwise not to. You can bring a witness or advisor with you, but organise this in good time as you are usually required to give names of those attending a couple of weeks ahead of the hearing.





In some instances the school’s representative will also present to the panel the school’s reasons against taking your child. But if there are a great number of appeals for the same school, there may be a public first stage appeal, when the school presents its case to all parents appealing, and then you present your own case at a private second stage appeal.

What are my chances of success?

It’s impossible to put a figure on this. The most recent government statistics on school appeals are from the 2019/2020 academic year and show that for secondary schools, on average around 22% of heard appeals are successful. That number varies enormously between schools, between parts of the country and even within regions. As a general rule, school appeals made in cities have a lower rate of success.

The number of appeals being lodged (and the number being heard) with Local Authorities has been increasing year on year for some time. In turn, the success rate for appeals has been falling. The table below gives some indication as to the likelihood of a successful appeal in your region.

Secondary school appeals success rates for entry into 2019/2020 academic year

Region	Number of appeals heard	Number of successful appeals	Success rate of heard appeals %
England	35,648	7,901	22.2
North East	1,380	463	33.6
North West	6,110	1,543	25.3
Yorks & Humber	3,650	758	20.8
East Midlands	3,261	915	28.1
West Midlands	4,127	715	17.3
East of England	2,796	684	24.5
London	5,334	616	11.7
South East	7,062	1,537	21.8
South West	1,928	670	34.8

Visit <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/admission-appeals-in-england> and scroll down for localised data relating to secondary admissions in your area.

What if my appeal is unsuccessful?

As the previous table shows, you should not bank on an appeal being successful: you must have a plan B. If you really cannot stomach the school you are being offered, our education consultancy service may be able to help guide you towards an alternative solution. We regularly help families find new schools in the state and independent sectors. Our services are priced competitively. To find out more about this service and how much it costs, visit www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/advice-service/our-services.

Still daunted?

We offer a telephone consultation with a highly experienced appeals expert. She will listen to your particular circumstances, suggest ways of approaching your appeal which will optimise your chances of success, advise on documentation you will need, guide you on how to prepare for the hearing, and give advice on dos and don'ts. She will be frank and realistic and tell you what your chances of success are. This service is priced at £220 and includes a phone call plus research into your situation, the school you've been offered and the school you prefer, prior to your call. Email appeals@goodschoolsguide.co.uk - for more information please visit: www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/advice-service/school-appeals

