Before the school meeting

A parent's prep sheet: what to ask, what to bring, and how to describe your child's mind clearly.

School meetings go better when you arrive with one clear picture of your child and leave with agreed actions in writing. This sheet helps you do both. Fill in the parts that are useful and bring it with you.

1. A few days before

- **Ask who will be there** and how long the meeting will last. If you can, ask for a short agenda.
- **Ask for copies in advance** of anything they plan to discuss, such as your child's support plan or recent reports.
- **Choose your one or two main points.** What is the most important thing you want to change or understand?
- **Bring someone if it helps.** A partner, relative or friend can take notes while you talk. Let the school know who is coming.
- **Ask your child what they think.** In their words, or a drawing. What's the best part of school? What's the hardest?

My main points for this meeting

What I want to come away with
1.
2.

2. What to bring

- ☐ Your notes from home: what you've noticed, when, and any patterns (for example, after PE, on Mondays, after a change of teacher)
- ☐ The school's current plan or latest report, if there is one
- ☐ Letters or reports from other professionals, such as a speech and language therapist, occupational therapist or paediatrician
- ☐ A few examples of your child's work, or photos of it
- ☐ Your child's own views
- ☐ This sheet, and something to write on

3. Describe your child's mind clearly

Labels and diagnoses can help, but they don't tell staff what to do on a wet Tuesday. What helps most is a clear description of what you see and what works. Try this pattern:

> **When** [the situation], **my child** [what happens], **and what helps is** [what helps].
>
> "When the classroom gets noisy, Sam stops talking and puts his head down, and what helps is a quiet place to reset for five minutes."

Describe what happens rather than how it looks from outside. "Needs time to switch between tasks" gives staff something to act on. "Can't cope" or "naughty" doesn't. It helps to cover these five areas:

- **Senses:** noise, light, smells, touch, crowds, busy corridors.
- **Attention and switching:** moving between tasks or rooms, changes to plans, how long they can focus and on what.
- **Meaning and pace:** do they need to know why? Do they need extra time to process instructions? Do they take words literally?
- **Energy across the day:** some children hold it together at school and fall apart at home. If that's your child, say so. It's important information, not a complaint about the school.
- **Where they soar:** strengths, interests and what lights them up. These are often the best way in.

My child's profile

Area	What I see	What helps
Senses		
Attention and switching		
Meaning and pace		
Energy across the day		
Where they soar		

4. Questions to ask

Understanding your child

- What do you see in school? When is my child at their best, and when is it hardest?
- Does what I see at home match what you see? If not, what might explain the difference?

Support now

- What support is in place at the moment? Who provides it, and how often?
- Is my child receiving SEN support, and is there a written plan I can have a copy of?

- What could change in the environment? For example: where they sit, warnings before a change, movement breaks, a quiet space, extra time to process.

Checking it works

- How will we know if the support is working? What will be different?
- When will we review it, and how will you keep me updated in between?

Next steps

- Who is my main contact, and what's the best way to reach them?
- Could anyone else help? For example the SENCo, an educational psychologist or a specialist teacher.
- If needs are significant: should we think about asking for an education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment?
- Can we have the agreed actions in writing?

5. In the meeting

- **Say your main point early,** so it doesn't get squeezed out at the end.
- **Ask what words mean.** Schools use a lot of initials. It's fine to say “Can you explain that?”
- **You don't have to agree on the spot.** “I'd like to think about that and come back to you” is a complete answer.
- **Write down who will do what, by when.** Use the table below.

What we agreed

What will happen	Who	By when

Next review date: _____

6. Afterwards

- **Send a short email within a day or two:** “Thank you for meeting me. To confirm what we agreed…” and list the actions. This gives everyone the same record.
- **Put the review date in your diary.** If it passes without a review, ask for one.
- **Keep a simple log** of what changes, good and bad. It makes the next meeting much easier.

Free, independent help (England)

Your local SENDIASS: every council area has a free, impartial SEND information, advice and support service for parents. Search for your council's name and “SENDIASS”.

IPSEA (ipsea.org.uk): free legal advice on special educational needs.

Contact (contact.org.uk): advice and a helpline for families with disabled children.

SEND law in England has not changed yet. The government plans reforms from around 2029. If you're told your child's support has changed because of new rules, ask for that in writing and check with your local SENDIASS.

One clear picture of how your child's mind works. The free CEIM Profile report from Infinite Hype describes where your child's mind soars, where it snags and what helps, in words you can take into school. Sign up at infinitehype.co.uk.