

School Environment Checklist

What to Ask and Prepare When Choosing a School or IEP Program

Kiron Autism Mission |
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Before You Visit: Prepare Your Child's Profile

Before touring schools or meeting with staff, put together a simple one-page summary of your child. This helps every conversation start from the same understanding.

- ☐ Diagnosis details and date (if applicable)
- ☐ Current therapies and their frequency (speech, OT, ABA, etc.)
- ☐ Communication style (verbal, non-verbal, uses AAC device, sign language, etc.)
- ☐ Sensory sensitivities (sounds, lights, textures, crowds)

- ☐ Known triggers and effective calming strategies
 - ☐ Strengths, interests, and things that motivate your child
 - ☐ Any behavioral support plan currently in place
 - ☐ Medical needs or medications relevant to the school day
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Questions to Ask About the Learning Environment

- ☐ What teaching methods and curriculum adaptations are used for autistic students?
- ☐ Is the school inclusive (mainstream with support), a dedicated special education setting, or a hybrid model?
- ☐ What is the average class size and staff-to-student ratio?
- ☐ Is a shadow teacher or one-on-one aide available, and how is that decided?
- ☐ How is progress tracked and communicated to parents (reports, meetings, apps)?
- ☐ How does the school handle transitions between activities or classrooms?
- ☐ Are visual schedules, timers, or structured routines used in the classroom?

Questions About Staff & Training

- ☐ Have teachers received specific training in autism or neurodiversity?
- ☐ Is there an on-site special educator, therapist, or counselor?
- ☐ Who is the primary point of contact for day-to-day concerns?
- ☐ How often can parents expect to meet with teachers or support staff?
- ☐ What is the staff turnover like for special education roles?

Questions About the Physical & Sensory Environment

- ☐ Is there a quiet/calm-down space available if a child becomes overwhelmed?
- ☐ How does the school manage sensory triggers (loud bells, bright lighting, crowded hallways)?
- ☐ Are noise-canceling headphones or sensory tools permitted in class?
- ☐ What does the cafeteria/lunch environment look like — noise level, seating options?

- ☐ How are recess and unstructured social time supervised and supported?
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Questions About Social & Emotional Support

- ☐ Are there structured social skills programs or peer-buddy systems?
 - ☐ How does the school address bullying or social exclusion?
 - ☐ Is there a counselor or psychologist available for emotional support?
 - ☐ How are meltdowns or emotional dysregulation handled by staff?
 - ☐ Is positive behavior support used, rather than punitive discipline?
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Questions Specific to IEP (Individualized Education Plan) Programs

- ☐ Who is on the IEP team, and how often does it meet?

- ☐ How are goals set, and how is progress measured against them?
 - ☐ Can parents request changes to the IEP outside scheduled reviews?
 - ☐ What accommodations are typically included (extra time, alternate assessments, assistive tech)?
 - ☐ How is the IEP communicated to all teachers who interact with your child?
 - ☐ What is the process if the current plan isn't working well?
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Logistics to Prepare and Confirm

- ☐ Application and enrollment timeline, including any waitlists
- ☐ Required documentation (diagnosis reports, therapy records, prior school records)
- ☐ Transport arrangements and any special accommodations needed
- ☐ Fee structure, including costs for aides, therapy, or specialized programs
- ☐ Trial period or transition plan before full enrollment
- ☐ Emergency contact and communication protocol

During Your Visit: What to Observe

- ☐ How do staff speak to and about the students?
- ☐ Do students appear engaged, calm, and comfortable in the space?
- ☐ Is the classroom visually organized, with clear routines on display?
- ☐ How do staff respond if a student becomes distressed during your visit?
- ☐ Does the environment feel welcoming, or does your child seem uneasy?

A Gentle Reminder

There is no single "perfect" school for every autistic child – only the environment that best fits your child's specific needs today. It's normal to revisit this decision as your child grows and their needs change. Trust your observations as much as any brochure or ranking.

The Kiron Autism Mission is here to support families through every stage of the educational journey. Reach out anytime at kironautismmission.org.