

School / pre-school admissions

The below comments are taken from Club members suggestions following a request for newsletter content during Autumn 2012 (still relevant).

The school & pre-school admissions process can be pretty daunting, especially if you are applying for the first time and have twins to consider! You want to make sure that you have fully researched all the options and are making an informed decision that will suit both children, as well as being realistic about which schools/pre-schools you have a chance of getting into. This is especially important in the St Albans and Harpenden area, given that so many of our local schools are significantly oversubscribed.

Pre-schools/nurseries – don't forget that from age 3 (in some cases from age 2, depending on financial circumstances), every child is entitled to 15 hours of free nursery education per week, for 38 weeks of the year. Find out more, including key dates, from the [Herts council nursery admissions page](#). This entitlement can be used for in-school nursery classes, at most private day nurseries or with most childminders.

Schools – mumsguideto.co.uk has pulled the following advice together for parents new to the system:

- Get to grips with how the system works. The [Herts County Council website](#) has a wealth of information about the local primary and secondary schools, how to apply and how places are allocated. You will also find all the key dates and deadlines for each stage.
- Go to as many Open Days as you can. In our opinion it's best to go to as many Open Days as you can to help you make an informed decision. If you've missed the Open Day for a school you're interested in, don't worry, just give them a call and they can usually arrange for you to have a tour.
- Be realistic in your choices. Before submitting your school/pre-school application it is worth looking on the [School Guru website](#). The 'Schools Admissions Calculator' can instantly tell you whether you would have been offered a place in your chosen school in previous school years (for a one-off annual charge). This can be an invaluable source of information when choosing which schools to put on your application. Definitely worth a look in our opinion!
- Submit your application on time: Once you have done all your research, you can access the [Herts County Council's online schools admissions application system](#). You can use the help manuals available on the website to guide you through.
- Know where to turn if you're disappointed with your allocation: If your child does not get offered a place at one of your preferred schools and you feel you have sufficient grounds for appeal, you may choose to appeal to the Independent Appeals Panel. Information on how to complete this process can again be found on the [Herts County Council website](#). There are Education Lawyers locally who specialize in this area of law and can assist with the appeals process.

Advice from mums who've 'been there / done that' includes:

- Go into a school with an open mind regardless of what you've heard – all children are different and a fantastic school with amazing results might not translate in to being the right environment for your child.
- Do look at Ofsted reports, but remember that they are absolutely NOT the whole picture and if you can, speak to parents with children already at the school and utilise local forums to get an idea about a school before you visit.
- Base your choice of school on your gut feeling for the place – not its published reporting. Take time looking around the schools that you can realistically apply to, and ask lots of questions.
- Ask the schools about their experiences with multiples – do they have a policy around separating twins, or is it parents' choice? If it's a single entry school, how do the staff plan to help your children become independent / encourage individuality? Spend time talking to your children's nursery key workers (if they attend nursery), the staff at the school they are going in to, and your children themselves to decide whether they would be better separated or together. Ensure the school is supportive of your decision either way!
- Using the [School Guru website](#) (for a one-off annual charge) can be invaluable to see statistics for prior years and whether you might get in to a preferred school – just remember that this is ONLY a guideline, and one year might drastically differ from another depending on birth rates, number of siblings applying to that school and so on.
- Remember that when it comes to completing the admission forms, you can only ever indicate PREFERENCES, not choices, and await the decisions from the admissions department. Try if possible to forget about it once those forms are sent in, and accept that what will be, will be.

Whatever happens, do remember that there are many fantastic schools in St Albans and surrounds, so even if the school you are allocated is not within walking distance, your kids will still almost certainly love it...