

What to ask when choosing a nursery

Nursery questionnaire

Starting your nursery journey can feel overwhelming, especially with so many options to consider. Every parent wants a place where their child will feel safe, happy and supported to thrive, but knowing what to look for isn't always easy.

That's why we've created this practical guide. From comparing nurseries and asking the right questions to understanding what really matters, it will help you make a confident, informed choice that's right for your child and family.

Top 10 things to know

Understand funded childcare

Ask how funded hours are applied, whether they are stretched across the year and what additional charges may apply.

Look beyond Ofsted ratings

Read the full report and ask what improvements have been made since the last inspection.

Meet the people who will care for your child

Find out how the key person approach works and how children move between rooms.

Ask about staff retention

Long-serving teams often provide greater consistency and stronger relationships.

Understand staff-to-child ratios

Ask how many children are typically in the room and whether staffing exceeds minimum requirements.

Understand school readiness

Look for a focus on confidence, independence, communication and social skills.

Learn about settling-in

A gradual transition can help children build trust and confidence.

Compare what is included in the fees

Check whether meals, snacks, activities, trips and consumables are included.

Explore the curriculum

Understand how learning is planned around children's interests and development.

Trust your instincts

Consider whether you can picture your child feeling happy, safe and thriving there.

Questions to ask during your visit

How will you help my child settle in during their first few weeks?

What does a typical outdoor session look like for my child's age group?

How will I know what my child has done, learned and enjoyed each day?

How do you support children with additional needs?

How do you support children who settle differently?

What does your curriculum look like and what do you prioritise?

How do funded hours work here, and what would my sessions actually cost?

What training and ongoing support does your team receive?

How do you communicate with parents if my child is having a difficult day?

What do you enjoy most about working here?

Are there any recent parent testimonials you'd like to show me?

Nursery comparison scorecard

Use our handy nursery comparison scorecard below to rate each area from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent). Complete one copy for each nursery you visit.

First Impressions	Score (1-5)
Children appear happy and engaged	
Staff interact warmly with children	
The environment feels welcoming and organised	
People and relationships	Score (1-5)
A key person is allocated to each child	
Settling-in visits are offered and families are often invited for feedback	
Staff-to-child ratios allow for individual attention	
Learning and development	Score (1-5)
Children are encouraged to learn independence	
Learning supports development and interests	
Regular updates are shared daily with families	
Outdoor learning	Score (1-5)
Regular access to outdoor spaces with physical activity encouraged	
Are they offering Eco School, Forest School or Beach School?	
Outdoor spaces reflect learning through play and imagination	

Food & wellbeing	Score (1-5)
Menus appear nutritious and balanced	
Dietary needs are accommodated and well managed at meal times	
Children's wellbeing is prioritised through activities	
Support, safety and inclusion	Score (1-5)
There is a named contact for SEND and additional needs	
Safeguarding and accident procedures are clearly explained	
The nursery has secure access and collection procedures	
Funding and practicalities	Score (1-5)
Funding and fees are explained clearly	
Sessions fit family routines	
Location works for daily journeys	

Reflection

What stood out most? _____

Any concerns or unanswered questions? _____

What did the environment feel like, was it set up for active learning?_____

Can I picture my child being happy here? Yes / Maybe / No

Overall Score: _____