

In brief: Working together through consultation

Consultation is a discussion held with the aim of sharing knowledge and opinions before making a decision. Schools need to consult so that they have information about the best way to teach and support all their students.

Getting the most out of consultation

Ask for a meeting before problems come up.

Before the meeting:

- Work out the purpose of the meeting and what everyone might want.
- Work out who needs to attend.

Useful information to bring:

- If the purpose is 'Getting to know the student' – take information on your child's strengths.
- If the purpose is 'Adjustments' – take reports that will help the teacher to work out the best support for your child, e.g. reports from occupational therapists, paediatricians, or psychologists.

During the meeting

- Focus on the needs of the student.
- Listen respectfully to each other without criticising.
- Speak openly and honestly. Hiding information so that people feel better does not help the student.
- Stay calm. It is better to take a break during the meeting than to be upset. Bring a person to help you if you find meetings difficult.

Before the meeting ends

- Work out if anyone else needs to be present at future meetings.
- Decide when to meet again to check how things are going.
- Agree on how to communicate going forward.
- Write down what everyone has agreed and what each person will do and when.

Consultation is an ongoing process. You may need several meetings to reach agreement on an issue.