Going to School

Restricted Growth Association

Working to benefit people with restricted growth and their families

GOING TO SCHOOL

This booklet is written primarily for the parents of children with restricted growth, their family and friends. The information it contains will also be useful for teachers, schools and education authorities. It will answer many of the questions parents have when their child is about to go to school:

- How do I decide which school to send my child to? Will my child have to go to a special school?
- What can I do to prepare my child for school?
- What should I tell the school about any special arrangements they should be making for my child?
- Should my child be assessed for Special Educational Needs? What does 'statementing' mean?
- What can I do if my child is teased or bullied?

Choosing a school

All parents spend a lot of time and energy thinking about their children's education. When your child has a restricted growth condition, you will be especially anxious to make the right decisions and ensure that the school fully understands and meets the particular needs of your child.

Many parents are concerned about what type of school they should send their child to. Children with a restricted growth condition should not go to a special school – they come from the normal range of intelligence and have only minimal physical special needs. Only if your child has disabilities relating to another condition may a school with a specialist unit be more appropriate, although such schools are not available in all regions.

In general, the factors you have to consider will be largely the same as for any other parent: the reputation of different schools, their strengths (academic, musical, etc.) and weaknesses, location, transport to and from the school, the cost of fees if private, etc.

There are other factors that you may have to consider, such as the school buildings themselves. For example, a school with a sprawling layout and lots of steps may be physically tough for children of short stature. However, most environmental problems that arise in schools can be solved if the school is willing to make the necessary adaptations.

> *‘I was determined that my son should go to the same primary school as all the other children in the area. I could see no reason for him not to – he has some special needs, but none that couldn't be met at the school. Besides, he spent a year at nursery and all his friends were going on to the same primary school. I think it would have been dreadful to send him somewhere different.’*

Finding out about schools

All schools should allow prospective parents to visit the school's premises, to meet and talk to staff. You should certainly take up this opportunity before making any choice. A visit will give you a feeling for the school and its facilities. It will also give you the chance to talk to staff and raise issues relating to your child's needs, such as special needs assessment (see below).

A visit will help you judge how well the school would deal with any particular problems your child might encounter. You can also use the opportunity to find out whether the school provides equal opportunities for all its pupils to participate fully in activities. For example, asking the question 'Would my child be considered equally along with other children for a part in the school play?' will give you a good idea about the school's attitude.

Talking to other parents whose children are already at the school can be very useful. Ask them questions such as how their children are finding life at the school, how approachable the staff are, how willing staff are to listen to parents' concerns and to take action to resolve difficulties.

Preparing your child

Starting at your first nursery or primary school is a major step. The prospect of the first day can stir up strong feelings: excitement, anticipation or anxiety – even in children who already have some 'pre-school' experience, e.g. in a PLA (Pre-school Learning Alliance) or nursery. School is often the first time children spend long periods in the company of other children without the 'buffer' of parents.

Children with a restricted growth condition may have particular anxieties about school, depending on their age and how aware they are of their difference in size compared with other children. Parents need to give extra support and encouragement at this time, emphasising the positive aspects of what going to school means.

As a parent, you may have to deal with your own anxieties, too.

> *‘I was so anxious about sending Sarah to school. I was almost afraid to entrust her to the staff – as if they wouldn't know how to take proper care of her. She started on a part-time basis and I was with her for the first week.*

Then they arranged for one of the classroom assistants to have special responsibility for her, but in practical terms, there wasn't that much help she had to give Sarah and it didn't take long for Sarah to fit in really well. ❞

❝ *Knowing how worried I would be on the first day, I arranged to be at a friend's house for the morning to help her with her kids. That meant I had someone to talk to and plenty of distractions.* ❞

Other common anxieties include worrying how the school will respond to any practical difficulties your child may experience, and worries about how other children and their parents will relate to your short-statured child. Many of these anxieties can be addressed by direct contact with teachers and other staff before the child goes to school (see below).

School uniform

Where uniform is compulsory, it is important to ensure your child has the same as everyone else. This may mean adapting the standard uniform, not only to make it fit but to make changing for PE and going to the toilet as easy as possible.

For more information on this subject, see the RGA **Lifestyles** booklet *What Shall I Wear?*.

Getting to school

What arrangements you make for getting your child to and from school will depend on your circumstances and the location of the school. You may be able to get financial help towards the costs of transport by claiming the Mobility component of Disability Living Allowance. This is a benefit for people with disabilities who have walking difficulties, and can be paid for children from the age of 5. You can claim by phoning the benefit enquiry line on 0800 88 22 00 and asking for claim form DLA1. The Restricted Growth Association will be happy to provide a letter in support of your claim and advice about filling in the rather lengthy and daunting forms.

Preparing the school

> *At school they thought they were going to get this timid little girl who needed to be treated with kid gloves. She's shown them she'll have a go at anything.*

Parents of children with restricted growth usually have to take an active role in preparing the school fully for the arrival of their child. Some of the key steps you can take include the following:

- Make sure the head teacher, the class teacher and the teacher responsible for special needs in the school know about any special needs before a child of restricted growth arrives at school. You may decide to ask for a meeting and take a list of points you want the school to know about. You may decide you would like your child formally assessed for Special Educational Needs (see below).

> *You have to make sure the information gets to the right people – sometimes this means being pushy and telling the same thing to different people, but you can't assume that information gets passed smoothly around a school.*

- Give information about your child's condition and agree what steps will be taken to meet their particular needs. It may help to take copies of relevant booklets produced by the Restricted Growth Association into the school, so that teachers and other staff have information to refer to. It is useful to provide the school with this information before you meet with them. This gives them an opportunity to become informed, be more confident and perhaps even change their initial attitude before you meet them.
- Try to *anticipate any practical problems*, so that your child can get on with the business of settling in at the new school, without being side-tracked by physical obstacles.
- Ensure the school has proper expectations about your child's *intellectual ability*: teachers should expect the same academic progress from your child as from the others – this may need to be stressed and even repeated.

- Ask the teacher to *prepare the class* for the newcomer and agree how this will be done. Or, if the whole class is new to the school, agree how the teacher will address situations that arise. The school should be willing to be guided by you on how to approach this. The aim should be to inform, without making the small child into a special case.

All discussions between teachers and parents should be conducted with the least possible fuss as the child may be embarrassed by being singled out for special treatment.

Encouraging independence at school

Independence is very important – teachers, assistants and other children need to be encouraged to let children of short stature do things for themselves as far as possible. For the children themselves, this may be a question of pride and determination. Pride is a special quality in a child who starts out at a disadvantage and needs to be treated with respect:

Other children often want to care for small children, to mother them, helping them with coats and shoes, picking them up, carrying them around, etc. This is undesirable and can be dangerous.

> ❛ *One day a boy was helping my daughter by carrying her up a steep bank. Unfortunately he slipped and her thigh was broken. Because she was little, they lifted her up, causing even more damage. It was an accident but the boy felt terrible.* ❜

Independence at each stage is necessary to build confidence to go on to other things too.

> ❛ *I don't have a carer or a special assistant, but a very good friend looks after me all the time. She helps me with things like carrying heavy physics text books about! I'm determined to go to university, but I'm nervous about how I'm going to cope.* ❜
>
> Mary, 17

Encouraging full participation

Unless there is a pressing medical reason, no school activity should be closed to a child with a restricted growth condition. There is no reason why a child can't play in the school orchestra, have a part in the school play, contribute to an art or design exhibition or run the computer club. Environmental adaptations may be needed, e.g. bringing a stool into a laboratory and rearranging equipment, but no activity should be ruled out simply because of inconvenience.

Teachers need to made aware of this and encouraged to see that the extra-small child does not get left out of activities because the others can run faster, push harder or reach higher. Even if their physical condition does impose limits on participation, children of restricted growth should be encouraged to make use of their own abilities. In fact it is all the more important that teachers help to build up their confidence by emphasising their abilities and praising their achievements.

Sports

When it comes to sports and PE, schools must be made aware of what your child should be able to do and should not do. Some children love sports, others do all they can to avoid them. If your child especially enjoys physical activity they should be encouraged to participate.

> ❝ *I took part in all the school sports – the same as any thin boy or six-foot boy. What was there to stop me?* ❞

You may need to remind the school of these key points:

- Put safety first – make sure the school knows of medical issues to be aware of, e.g. not putting too much pressure on back or joints, avoiding awkward twisting activities or impact activities, such as trampolining. Neck problems are associated with some restricted growth conditions (see the **What is...?** booklets). Children with neck problems are advised to avoid exercises such as forward rolls.
- Avoid games and sports that become too rough or exhausting, such as rugby.

> *I used to play rugby at school, but I found I couldn't keep up and in tackles my head was often the same height as their boots – and those metal studs are no joke.*

- Ensure your child can be excused from team games where they cannot compete on equal terms or where they feel 'out of it'. Non-competitive sports activities can be enjoyed by all children, and teachers should be encouraged to provide opportunities for these.
- Let your child participate selectively in gymnastics – this is something that should be discussed between you, your child and your child's teacher. Some children of restricted growth are highly adept at acrobatics and the use of the trampoline, but you should also take into account the possible adverse effects on your child's joints.
- Make the school aware of which activities are good for people with skeletal dysplasias, e.g. swimming and cycling, which put minimal pressure on the spine.

Exercise

On the subject of exercise, it is worth encouraging your child to do a few warm-up exercises in the morning – especially if they have a particularly active day ahead at school. This not only helps them limber up and prepare for the exertions of the day ahead, but it also helps to build up strength and muscle tone – especially important in children of short stature. Good exercises are those which gently stretch the muscles in different parts of the body, such as:

- Bending over to the floor, with knees bent, and arms and head allowed to dangle loosely, then standing up slowly straightening the back.
- Reaching with the arms – above the head, to the front or to the side.
- Stepping and/or pointing with the feet.
- Rolling the head gently from side to side and across the chest (but never backwards) in order to stretch the neck muscles.

The vital thing with exercise is to avoid anything which puts stress on the back, neck or vulnerable joints, such as twisting, arching, stretching the head back or vigorous jumping. A physiotherapist with a knowledge of bone dysplasias would be the ideal person with whom to work out a simple and effective exercise régime. A physiotherapist with no experience of bone dysplasias should be provided with a copy of the relevant RGA **What is...?** booklet.

An exercise video aimed at people with restricted growth, called *The Perfect Little Body Workout*, is available and may be borrowed from the Restricted Growth Association (RGA) Library or purchased from the LPA (Little People of America). (Ask the RGA Office for contact details if you are not a member of LPA.)

Special educational needs provision

Before your child starts school, the school will want to know about his or her special educational needs.

What is meant by 'special educational needs'?

By special educational needs, the school means anything your child might require beyond what is provided for all their pupils. Being assessed for special educational needs (SEN) is a formal process whereby your child's needs are discussed with the school, and plans are agreed and written down for meeting those needs. Either the school, education authority or you might want your child's special needs formally assessed in this way and a *statement* of their needs produced. Some educational authorities will make provision for your child's special needs without the lengthy procedure of a statement. Others will insist on it.

What is a Statement of Special Educational Needs?

Statements of Special Educational Needs are legal documents which identify a child's needs and bind the authority to make provision as laid out in the statement. The assessment that leads to statementing assesses what a child needs in order to be able to receive a full curriculum and education without any unnecessary disadvantages. It does not assess your child's medical condition. For example, the education authority does not want to know why a child with achondroplasia has short arms, rather they want to know the implications of short arms on the child's ability to learn and to get a full education, e.g. the fact that standard classroom furniture may present obstacles to developing writing skills.

> *My little boy always started writing half-way down the page. When the teacher told him not to, he knelt up on his chair. This was also frowned upon until it was explained that he just couldn't reach the top of the paper. Eventually the school provided a sloping writing desk.*

What does the assessment procedure involve?

There are five stages in the assessment process. The first three stages are school-based, whereas stages 4 and 5 also involve the local education authority. All schools should have a Special Needs Policy explaining what happens at each stage, but a summary of the five stages is included below. Schools should also have a Special Needs Co-ordinator to whom you can talk about your child.

Not all children need to go through all the stages: some will not need to go beyond stage 1 (which mainly involves the classroom teacher). Others will proceed quickly to a formal assessment at stages 4 and 5.

- Stage 1: Your child's teacher records any concerns about your child's learning. As a parent you can tell the teacher about your concerns. The teacher informs your school's Special Needs Co-ordinator who registers your child's special educational need. Your child will receive extra help from the teacher for as long as it is needed to overcome the difficulties – provided the teacher has the time and resources at their disposal.
- Stage 2: Your child is given an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which states targets agreed with your child's teacher and the school's SEN Co-ordinator.
- Stage 3: The school's Special Needs Co-ordinator asks for help from outside the

school to work alongside your child and the teachers. Depending on your child's needs, the school might call in a Support Teacher, Educational Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Paediatric Physiotherapist or Speech and Language Therapist.

- Stage 4: You or the Head Teacher may ask the Local Education Authority (LEA) to make a statutory assessment of your child – that is, a detailed examination to find out what your child's special educational needs are. You will be invited to talk with an educational psychologist, who will explain what has to be done and will answer any of your questions.
- Stage 5: The Local Education Authority completes the statutory assessment. They will usually issue a Statement of Special Educational Needs for the pupil ('statementing'). This is a collection of all the reports. It also sets out the child's needs and describes how these needs will be met.

  You will be given a draft copy of the statement to see if you agree with what is written. When you have agreed to the statement it becomes a legal document. The LEA has to give your child the help that is written on the statement. It has to be reviewed by the school every year. You must be invited to the review.

What are the pros and cons of SEN assessment and statementing?

Because you have the legal right to contribute at various stages of the SEN assessment process, you know your voice must be heard and your child's needs taken fully into account. You can state what help you think your child needs, e.g. in terms of physical adaptations. It may also be easier to get a school to agree to environmental adaptations if the LEA is involved and a statement made.

The Restricted Growth Association has prepared information sheets on different conditions which can be adapted to provide an 'Appendix of evidence' for a Statement of Special Educational Needs assessment. They cover both the physical and psychological needs of children with restricted growth. They can also be used more informally to convey information to teachers. Members provide their child's name, date of birth and address, and the sheets are tailored specifically to the child. An example of part of one for a boy with achondroplasia is shown later in this booklet. Contact the RGA office for more information.

One possible drawback to SEN assessment is the danger of stigmatisation by staff or other children. There may be a tendency to see all SEN children as the same, whether they have physical, emotional or learning difficulties.

In some instances SEN assessment can lead to help being made available where independence might be more beneficial, e.g. climbing onto a step to get onto the toilet may make a child feel independent whereas being lifted up by a welfare assistant could encourage feelings of dependence and 'difference'.

How do I ask for SEN assessment?

The first point of contact should be your child's Head Teacher. After that, either you or the school may then contact the LEA for a full assessment.

You may want to make sure other people are involved in the process: teachers and governors, Social Services, the school's Special Needs Coordinator, a Paediatric Physiotherapist, the Restricted Growth Association.

What do I do if I am not happy with the assessment?

Be prepared to fight your corner! You can appeal against the final statement. Your school and the LEA should have policy statements about what you can do if you disagree with their interpretation of your child's needs.

You can also contact IPSEA (Independent Panel for Special Educational Advice), a voluntary organisation made up of independent experts, for impartial advice and an expert second opinion. They can also help parents wanting to make a written contribution to the child's assessment. For further information, send an SAE to IPSEA, 22 Warren Hill Road, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 4DU.

So, does my child have Special Educational Needs?

The answer to this question is 'it depends', on several things: the sorts of difficulties your child encounters at school, how you regard your child's needs and the view your LEA takes. Some LEAs will refuse to assess a child when parents want an assessment, whereas others will insist on stage 4 assessment, when the parents might prefer a less formal approach. Your LEA should have a written policy – ask them for a copy.

> ❛ *I didn't want my child labelled as a 'special case' – I wanted Maria to feel like a normal pupil. The school were happy with this and helped overcome any problems as discreetly as possible.* ❜
>
> Maria's parents

> ❛ *I felt the school was failing Darren so I pressed for a full assessment. It was hard work getting the LEA to agree, but I now feel I have the power to demand Darren's needs are met.* ❜
>
> Darren's parents

Environmental adaptations

> ❛ *My teacher complained that I couldn't sit still and listen in class. She told my parents at parents' evening and they pointed out that my feet couldn't touch the floor, so I got pins and needles in my legs. It was much better after I was given a box to rest my feet on – it stopped me getting back ache, too. At senior school I have a box and a cushion (a covered foam slab) in each classroom, so I can sit comfortably in school chairs. You can get custom-made chairs, but this way was much cheaper and more practical.* ❜

> ❛ *My teacher never asked me to answer questions in class, which I found really annoying, until I realised that she couldn't see that I had my hand up, because my arm is so short.* ❜

Many of the difficulties faced by children going to school are environmental. Most of these can be overcome with the cooperation of the school and the necessary investment of time and money on their part. It will be important to explain to the school why any adaptations are needed. An effective way of providing this information is by means of an information sheet. The Restricted Growth Association produces information sheets which can be customised for members. An example of part of one information sheet for a boy with achondroplasia is reproduced opposite. Its approach is first to explain the problems faced by the child and then to describe what provision is needed.

Furniture Provision

Nicholas needs some furniture provision and consideration to prevent spinal problems and so that he does not become tired, irritable and frustrated.

Seating

Nicholas will find it very uncomfortable to sit on the floor, e.g. at story time, without a support for his back. He needs to be encouraged to take care of his back to prevent later problems.

Nicholas's trunk is the normal size but the length of his thigh is shorter. Consequently he has to move forward in the chair until the bend of his knee is at the front edge of the chair. It is possible to get special chairs but sometimes these are rejected by children who feel it marks them out as different. An alternative approach is to have a school satchel over the back of the chair to provide support for his back and to push him forward in the seat until he can bend his knees over the front edge. He will need a box under his feet so that the weight of his legs is not constantly pulling on his knees. Again children often reject these as marking them out as different. RGA recommends the purchase of three stacking Lakeland plastic steps which cost about £13. These can be used in the home corner, or wherever, by the other children in the class and are thereby seen as a normal piece of classroom equipment. One of these steps can then be slipped under the Nicholas's feet without marking him out as conspicuously different.

If Nicholas is sitting on a chair away from a table he may have difficulty balancing or it may be a strain. This is because he has short arms and will be unable to reach down on the chair seat to support himself. (As he gets older, of course, his balance will improve.) In these circumstances Nicholas should be positioned next to an appropriate support (e.g. a wall).

As Nicholas gets older, he may have classes in a room with stools (labs and art rooms). Nicholas will need a backrest and a rung for his feet. It is preferable to have a few of these stools provided as standard classroom furniture so that Nicholas is not marked out as different.

Reaching

Nicholas will have a restricted reach (though he will be adept at climbing up to reach what he wants!). This will not only affect his ability to get things out of high cupboards and shelves, but also he may experience difficulty reaching the top of the page for writing or painting. Rather than encouraging him to kneel up on the chair to overcome this problem, more appropriate-sized paper should be provided. A cloakroom peg at a lower height may also be needed.

Toileting

Nicholas may have a problem getting onto the toilet (if it is not a small toilet) because of the height of the toilet seat. Once on the toilet seat, he may have problems balancing because his arms are too short to reach down to steady himself. This will be a particular problem on an adult toilet seat where there is the risk of him dropping through. He will also have problems cleaning himself because his arms are too short to reach. Adults use 'bottom wipers' but these are difficult for a young child to manipulate. Therefore Nicholas may need a small toilet with side rails and an attendant to clean him. As he grows older he will develop strategies to overcome these problems. Making arrangements sensitively for his toileting will aid the development of his self-esteem and independence.

Nicholas will also have problems reaching hand basins and sinks, not just getting up to them but more particularly reaching right back to the taps. He may require a special facility, such as a lowered washbasin or tap extensions. A step might be used but may be unsafe with a small child in wet conditions.

Carrying Heavy Bags

It is recommended that Nicholas does not carry heavy bags. This might occur, for instance, on school trips or later in his school life, when carrying textbooks. In that situation it is recommended that he have duplicate copies at school and home.

Speech Problems

The Association is unclear at present whether speech problems are associated with achondroplasia. A survey has been undertaken of RGA Members but the results are inconclusive. If Nicholas has speech problems, they might be due to his achondroplasia. Certainly hearing and breathing/sleeping problems are often due to the condition. This, of course, can cause fatigue.

Ask the school to respond positively (and discreetly) to other obstacles as they arise – e.g. if a child has difficulty reaching the drinking fountain or moving around from classroom to classroom in the time allotted between lessons.

RGA members' experience is that the attitude of the school is crucial. Some schools are reluctant to spend money on adaptations needed for only one person (which is one reason you might decide to press for SEN statementing). Others will already be well-equipped (especially if they have a good Special Needs unit) and will be responsive to an individual pupil's needs.

Other people's attitudes

Many children with restricted growth go through school with few problems, enjoying their work and the company of their friends. Many actually enjoy the fact that everyone knows who they are and quickly learn to turn their difference into an advantage.

> *❛ Peter has always been an outgoing, confident boy despite his condition. He took school in his stride. In fact it was harder for Katy, his younger sister who is average-sized. When she went to the same school, she was often introduced as 'Peter's sister', rather than as 'Katy'. She felt she was always in his shadow, even though it was a small one! ❜*

However, many parents of children with restricted growth have concerns about how other people will react to their child at school: not just teachers, but other pupils and their parents too. Most problems occur because other people do not know why your child looks different. This makes them anxious. A useful approach is to talk to anyone who makes any unpleasant comment. Don't be aggressive because this will increase their anxiety. Explain why your child looks different and talk about your child by name, so that they think of your child as a familiar person. Tell them that your child is made very unhappy by their comments. Explain that it is important that your child gains self-confidence and it doesn't help to have this undermined. If your approach is friendly, you will usually find that they relax and will become your child's supporter. You will also find that, with the issue solved, your child will no longer be the centre of attention as the other person will become more interested in aspects of their own life.

> ❛ *I wrote an informal note to all the other parents in my son's primary class, outlining briefly that Ryan was short-statured, that it's OK to be different and how we would like others to respect him and support him; specifically, how we would like his condition explained to peers should they ask. I highlighted that we all had the same goals for our children – to have a happy, fulfilling life at school and beyond. It should not have been necessary in an ideal world, but it worked for us and the other parents were grateful that we had given them the facts.* ❜

If unpleasant comments are made, all children of short stature learn how to deal with them in their own way. All you may be able to do is show your love, support and encouragement, and explain that it is other people's lack of understanding that is the problem.

> ❛ *I used to dread the first day of term, because there was always a load of new people coming into the school who didn't know me. Then you'd get all the usual comments about your size. Once they got to know me it always stopped, but it's hard at first.* ❜

It is important to raise any concerns you have with the school, especially if the behaviour is more serious, such as bullying. Most schools have a policy to deal with bullying, so any incidents should be brought to the attention of the head teacher or head of year. Many teachers will be alert to the difficulties which could arise for your child, but occasionally teachers may need to be alerted to their own inappropriate behaviour:

> ❛ *My teacher was forever patting me on the head. I hated it, even if it was meant to be friendly.* ❜

In most cases teachers only need to be alerted to the problem to modify their behaviour. Very occasionally, an insensitive teacher may require in-service education to make them more aware.

If you are not satisfied with the steps the school takes, you may have to take radical steps yourself. Perhaps an alternative school might have a better approach.

Another problem many small children experience at school is being 'overlooked'. If they do not develop the capacity to push themselves forward, they tend to be overlooked by both staff and other children. Their difficulties can be ignored as well as their talents. Teachers need to be aware that not all children possess the confidence or ability to overcome this prejudice.

Other children of short stature experience the opposite problem of being too conspicuous. This can result in them getting more than their share of blame or unwanted attention:

> *❛ I was always in trouble as the teachers could easily recognise me in a crowd of other boys whether I was causing the problem or not! ❜*

In some cases children may be labelled as 'difficult' or 'troublemakers' when in fact they are just reacting or retaliating to others' negative behaviour:

> *❛ The head teacher called us in as my 6-year-old son had bitten another boy. When I discovered the name of this boy, I found he was the one that all the parents were complaining about for being a bully. He kicked my son and called him names. My son tried to ignore it, but it got too much. ❜*

That is not to say that children of short stature can't themselves ever be troublemakers or even bullies – for them being aggressive may be one way of trying to establish their presence and compensate for their lack of height. As parents, though, it is important to face up to this and not let this sort of behaviour go unchecked. You will need to explain that aggression will only evoke a negative reaction in other people, which in turn is likely to rebound on the aggressor. In the long run, it is far better to earn people's respect than their fear.

Moving up

During their school career, children may change schools two or three times, e.g. from nursery to primary, from primary to secondary, from secondary to sixth-form college. For any child, these changes can be difficult and disruptive. For children with restricted growth and their parents, each change means dealing afresh with all the issues outlined in this booklet. And as they get older, the differences between them and average-sized children become more obvious. The change from primary to secondary school can be particularly daunting, as they meet a whole new group of teachers and children, many of whom will be much older and taller than themselves.

> ❛ I *hated it – going from being top dog in a small school to being a small fish in a huge pond. The first year was tough – loads of idiots asking "Why are you so short?". It took a while to learn to speak up for myself and answer back. But I soon made lots of friends and began to enjoy myself.* ❜

For parents, taking the steps described earlier to prepare the new school is just as important for secondary as primary schools. As they get older, your children should develop their own strategies for dealing with the other problems they face and developing into independent teenagers (see also the RGA **Lifestyles** booklet *The Teenage Years*). However, it can be useful, if your child agrees, to ask those classmates who know your child to support him/her in any situations where your child is faced with a confrontation. In this way your child will not face the situations alone. Explain to your child's classmates that the best approach is not to be aggressive; instead they should calmly give the people causing the problem information and ask them to join in discouraging others from making your child feel uncomfortable in the new school. The troublemakers will either feel able to support your child if the need arises or will simply lose interest – either way the result will be a greatly improved situation for your child.

Useful resources

- Children First: A Guide to the Needs of Disabled Children in School, available from RADAR, Publications Dept, 12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF.
- The Centre for Studies on Integration into Education (CSIE) publishes free information leaflets on issues surrounding the integration of children with special needs into mainstream education. Tel: 0117 923 8450.

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The RGA encourages members to share information and sources of help.

Other RGA publications

What is...?

The **What is...?** series looks at particular restricted growth conditions or issues. The titles in this series are:

Achondroplasia

Hypochondroplasia

Pseudoachondroplasia

SED

MED

Diastrophic dysplasia

Rarer syndromes

Lifestyles

The **Lifestyles** series focuses on particular aspects of living with a restricted growth condition. The other titles in this series are:

Babies and the Early Years

The Teenage Years

Careers, Employment and Education

Having a Baby

Adoption

The Later Years

Driving a Car

Bikes, Trikes and Ride-on Toys

Sporting Opportunities

What Shall I Wear?

Limb Surgery

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