



Fernways Parent Guide to Qualifications and Next Steps

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At Fernways, pupils work towards a range of qualifications suited to their abilities and future goals.

Each qualification builds confidence and helps pupils prepare for life after school — whether that's college, an apprenticeship, or work.

Every pupil at Fernways has an EHCP. This means that they are entitled to remain in education or training until the age of 25 if it continues to meet their needs and support their progress.

For some of our pupils, earlier school experiences may not have been positive. At Fernways, we recognise that each young person's educational journey is unique — and it's perfectly fine if it takes a little longer. What matters most is that our pupils develop confidence, resilience, and a belief in their own abilities as they move forward.

This guide explains what each qualification level means, what pupils study, how they're assessed, and where each pathway can lead.

Education, EHCPs, and Next Steps

- **Education until 25:**

If your child has an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan), they can remain in education or training until the age of 25 if it helps them meet their agreed outcomes and prepare for adult life. The focus is always on helping them gain the skills, confidence, and independence they need for the future.

- **Annual EHCP Review:**

Each year, your child's EHCP is reviewed to check progress, update targets, and discuss next steps such as college, supported internships, or work-related learning. You can request that post-16 or post-19 options are discussed during this meeting so that planning starts early.

- **Local Authority (LA) responsibility:**

The Local Authority must ensure that suitable educational provision continues while your child has an EHCP. This can include specialist college placements, supported internships, or vocational training. If your child is not yet ready for full-time employment or higher study, they must still receive support to continue learning and developing their skills.

- **Transition planning:**

Starting early helps. From Year 9 onwards, Fernways supports families to explore future pathways and liaises with the LA and colleges to plan a smooth and positive transition. Visits to potential colleges, training providers, or workplaces can be arranged as part of this process.

- **Apprenticeships and the EHCP:**

Young people with an EHCP can take part in an apprenticeship or traineeship, as long as the training provider and employer can meet the support needs written in the plan.

The EHCP will remain active until your child achieves the agreed outcomes or the Local Authority decides, with your agreement, that it is no longer needed.

During an apprenticeship, reasonable adjustments (such as mentoring, flexible assessment, or additional learning support) should still be provided. The EHCP may be reviewed and updated to reflect this new setting.

- **Your voice matters:**

Parents, carers, and pupils are key partners in planning the next stage of education. You can ask questions, share concerns, and request visits to colleges or training providers as part of the transition process. It's important that both family and professionals work together to find the best environment for your child to thrive.

Qualification Levels Overview

Qualification Level	Typical Age / Stage	Examples	Next Step / Leads To
Entry Level (1–3)	KS4 (Years 10–11)	AQA unit awards, LASER Awards, ASDAN, WJEC Entry Pathways, OCR Life & Living Skills, Functional Skills,	→ Foundation or Level 1 college courses
Level 1	Year 11 – College	BTEC Introductory, City & Guilds Level 1, WJEC Level 1 Awards, Functional Skills	→ Level 2 courses or vocational training
Level 2	College (Year 12–13)	GCSEs (Grades 4–9), BTEC Level 2 Diplomas, WJEC Level 2 Awards, NVQ Level 2	→ Level 3 courses, apprenticeships, or skilled work
Level 3	Post-16 / College	A-Levels, BTEC Level 3 Diplomas, T-Levels, Advanced Apprenticeships, UAL Level 3 Diploma, OCR Cambridge Technical (Level 3), NCFE Level 3 Applied General Qualifications, CACHE Level 3 Diplomas, City & Guilds / VTCT Technical Level 3 Qualifications	→ University or Higher Apprenticeships
Levels 4–6	University / Higher Education	Foundation Degrees, HNC/HND, Bachelor's Degrees, Degree Apprenticeships	→ Professional careers or postgraduate study

AQA unit awards, Entry Level
(1–3) LASER, WJEC Pathways,
OCR Life & Living, Functional

Level 1 BTEC Introductory,
LASER, ASDAN Employability

Level 2 GCSEs, BTEC Level 2,
NVQ 2, ASDAN 2

A-Levels, BTEC Level 3 Diplomas, T-Levels, Advanced Apprenticeships, UAL Level 3
Diploma, OCR Cambridge Technical (Level 3), NCFE Level 3 Applied General
Qualifications, CACHE Level 3 Diplomas, City & Guilds / VTCT Technical Level 3
Qualifications

Level 4–5 HNC, HND,
Foundation Degrees

Level 6 Degrees, Higher
Apprenticeships

Each qualification represents progress — whether in confidence, skill, or independence.

Fernways supports every pupil to achieve qualifications that match their ability, interests, and future goals.

Our aim is to do this within the constraints of timetabling and while ensuring that we accommodate every pupil's individual needs.

What matters most is that each young person leaves feeling capable, confident, and ready for their next steps.

Entry Level Qualifications (Entry 1–3)

For pupils working below GCSE level.

These qualifications focus on confidence, independence, and early work or life skills.

Examples:



LASER Awards,



ASDAN Programmes,



WJEC Entry Pathways,



OCR Life and Living Skills,

Functional Skills (Entry 1–3).

Subjects: Art and Craft, Health and Wellbeing, Cooking, Digital Skills, Independent Travel, Teamwork, Communication.

Assessment: Coursework, practical tasks, and teacher observation (no exams).

Next Steps: Foundation or Level 1 college courses, Supported Internships, or Life Skills programmes.

Encourage your child to talk about what they enjoy most at school — creative, hands-on, or practical learning



What it is: Small, flexible qualifications that recognise progress in life skills, independence, and work preparation.

Subjects / focus: Everyday skills like using money, communication, teamwork, personal safety, or preparing for work.

How it's assessed: Through classroom activities, projects, and teacher observation (no exams).

Requirements: Pupils complete short "units" of work to build credits. Each learner can work at their own pace and ability.



ASDAN Programmes

What it is: Practical, project-based qualifications that help pupils develop personal, social, and employability skills.

Subjects / focus: Life skills, work skills, and community involvement (e.g. *Personal Progress, Personal and Social Development, Employability Skills*).

How it's assessed: By completing a portfolio of evidence showing learning through tasks and real-life activities.

Requirements: Pupils complete set challenges or units; there are no written exams. Work is moderated by ASDAN to confirm achievement.



WJEC Entry Pathways

What it is: Nationally recognised qualifications for learners working below GCSE level.

Subjects / focus: Creative Arts, Independent Living, Humanities, ICT, Science and Technology.

How it's assessed: Through coursework, teacher assessment, and project work (no final exam).

Requirements: Pupils complete a set number of units for an *Award, Certificate, or Diploma* depending on how much work they complete.

OCR OCR Life and Living Skills

What it is: A flexible qualification designed to build practical life, work, and community skills.

Subjects / focus: Cooking, travel training, managing money, health and fitness, communication, and working with others.

How it's assessed: By completing small units of practical work, supported by evidence (photos, written work, observation).

Requirements: Pupils can achieve Awards, Certificates, or Diplomas depending on the number of units completed.

Functional Skills (Entry 1–3)

What it is: National qualifications that focus on using English, Maths, and ICT in real-life situations.

Subjects / focus: Reading and writing, speaking and listening, handling money, telling time, and using computers safely.

How it's assessed: Through practical tasks and short tests when ready.

Requirements: Pupils progress through Entry Level 1, 2, and 3 before moving on to Level 1 or Level 2 Functional Skills at college.

What it is: Small, nationally recognised certificates awarded by AQA that celebrate individual achievements in specific skills or topics. These are not full qualifications but recognise progress and participation in learning.

Subjects / focus: A wide range of areas, including art and design, life skills, communication, maths, ICT, cooking, gardening, teamwork, and personal development. Units can be tailored to pupils' interests and EHCP outcomes.

How it's assessed: Pupils complete short, practical tasks or projects. Evidence such as photos, written work, or teacher observation is submitted for verification. Each completed unit earns an official AQA certificate — no exams required.

Requirements: There are no formal entry requirements. Pupils can work towards individual units at their own level and pace, and each certificate provides evidence of progress and achievement.

Progression: Builds confidence and motivation, providing a stepping stone towards Entry Level qualifications such as LASER, ASDAN, or WJEC Entry Pathways. Recognised by colleges as evidence of engagement and learning progress.

Level 1 Qualifications

Designed for pupils who are developing confidence and independence in learning.
They focus on practical and vocational skills.

Examples:

 **BTEC Introductory Diplomas,**

 **City & Guilds Awards,**

 **WJEC Level 1 Awards,**

 **LASER Level 1 Awards,**

 **ASDAN Employability,**

Functional Skills Level 1.

Subjects: Art & Design, Sport, Animal Care, Construction, Hair & Beauty, Catering, Health & Social Care, Business, Digital Media, Horticulture.

Assessment: Coursework, projects, and practical activities (no written exams).

Next Steps: Level 2 courses, supported apprenticeships, or work-based training

Visit local colleges early to ask about their foundation or Level 1 courses. Many offer taster days for SEND learners.

 **BTEC Introductory Diplomas (Level 1)**

What it is: Practical, work-related qualifications that introduce pupils to different industries and skills.

Subjects / focus: Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, Sport, IT, Hospitality, and more.

How it's assessed: Coursework, projects, and practical activities — no final exams.

Requirements: Pupils complete a series of assignments; grades are based on effort and understanding.

Entry requirements: Usually for learners working at Entry Level 3 or who have completed Entry Level qualifications (such as LASER or ASDAN).

Leads to: Level 2 BTEC, vocational college courses, or supported apprenticeships.



City & Guilds Awards (Level 1)

What it is: Technical qualifications focusing on practical and hands-on skills.

Subjects / focus: Construction, Hair & Beauty, Catering, Animal Care, Engineering, or Horticulture.

How it's assessed: Through practical tasks and teacher assessment, not exams.

Requirements: Pupils complete small units to build up an Award, Certificate, or Diploma.

Entry requirements: Suitable for pupils working at Entry Level 3 who can work safely and follow instructions.

Leads to: Level 2 vocational courses or entry-level work training.



WJEC Level 1 Awards

What it is: Nationally recognised short qualifications for learners developing basic academic or creative skills.

Subjects / focus: Art, Photography, Digital Media, Enterprise, or ICT.

How it's assessed: Through classroom projects, creative work, and written tasks.

Requirements: Pupils complete set tasks to show skills and understanding; there are no formal exams.

Entry requirements: Pupils should be working at Entry Level 3 or higher and ready for short written or creative tasks.

Leads to: Level 2 courses or GCSE study.



LASER Level 1 Awards

What it is: Flexible qualifications that focus on personal development, work skills, and independence.

Subjects / focus: Employability, Independent Living, Volunteering, or Community Skills.

How it's assessed: Through short, practical units and evidence of learning (photos, teacher observation, written work).

Requirements: Pupils earn credits for completing small units of work at their own pace.

Entry requirements: Pupils usually move onto LASER Level 1 after completing Entry Level LASER Awards or other Entry 3 qualifications.

Leads to: Supported internships, work-based training, or Level 2 study.



ASDAN Employability (Level 1)

What it is: A practical qualification helping pupils prepare for the world of work.

Subjects / focus: Communication, teamwork, applying for jobs, problem-solving, and workplace behaviour.

How it's assessed: Pupils build a portfolio showing what they have learned through tasks and activities.

Requirements: Complete set challenges and gather evidence (no exams).

Entry requirements: Ideal for pupils working at Entry Level 3 or higher, who are developing readiness for work or college.

Leads to: Work experience, supported internships, or further vocational study.

Functional Skills Level 1 (English, Maths, ICT)

What it is: Qualifications that focus on using English, Maths, and ICT in everyday life and work.

Subjects / focus: Reading, writing, communication, handling money, problem-solving, and using computers safely.

How it's assessed: Short practical tests when pupils are ready.

Requirements: Pupils work towards passing in real-life, practical contexts.

Entry requirements: Pupils usually progress to Level 1 after passing Entry Level 3 Functional Skills.

Leads to: Functional Skills Level 2, GCSEs, or vocational college courses.

Level 2 Qualifications

Level 2 qualifications help pupils strengthen academic and practical skills. Equivalent to GCSE grades 4–9.

Examples:

GCSEs,

 **BTEC Level 2 Diplomas,**

 **City & Guilds Awards,**

 **WJEC Level 2 Awards,**

Functional Skills Level 2,

 **ASDAN Level 2,**

 **NVQ Level 2.**

Subjects: Health & Social Care, Engineering, Travel & Tourism, Media, Photography, Childcare, Business, Animal Care, Performing Arts, IT.

Assessment: Coursework, practical projects, and short tests or exams.

Next Steps: Level 3 courses (A-Levels, T-Levels, or BTECs), Apprenticeships, or Employment.

Check if your child's preferred college offers support for English and Maths resits as part of their Level 2 study.

GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education)

- **What it is:** National academic qualifications in subjects like English, Maths, Science, and Art, usually taken in Years 10–11.
- **How it's assessed:** Through written exams and some coursework or practical work (depending on the subject).
- **Entry requirements:** No specific qualifications needed, but pupils are usually working at Level 1 or above before starting.
- **Leads to:** Level 3 courses such as A-Levels, BTECs, or apprenticeships.

BTEC Level 2 Diplomas / Certificates

- **What it is:** Vocational qualifications that mix classroom learning with practical, hands-on projects.
- **Subjects / focus:** Health & Social Care, Art & Design, Business, Sport, Engineering, IT, and more.
- **How it's assessed:** Coursework, assignments, and practical activities (not all exam-based).
- **Entry requirements:** Usually for pupils who have completed a Level 1 qualification or achieved GCSE grades 1–3.
- **Leads to:** Level 3 BTEC Diplomas, apprenticeships, or employment.



City & Guilds Awards (Level 2)

- **What it is:** Practical qualifications focusing on skills for specific trades or careers.
- **Subjects / focus:** Construction, Hair & Beauty, Catering, Motor Vehicle Maintenance, Animal Care, Engineering.
- **How it's assessed:** Through practical tasks, teacher observation, and short written work.
- **Entry requirements:** Completion of a Level 1 qualification or equivalent experience.
- **Leads to:** Level 3 vocational courses, apprenticeships, or skilled employment.



WJEC Level 2 Awards

- **What it is:** Nationally recognised qualifications for creative or academic subjects.

- **Subjects / focus:** Photography, Art, Media, Enterprise, ICT, and Digital Technology.
- **How it's assessed:** Coursework and project work marked by teachers and moderated externally.
- **Entry requirements:** Pupils are usually working at Level 1 or have completed Entry 3 or Level 1 study.
- **Leads to:** Level 3 courses (A-Levels, BTECs, or T-Levels).

Functional Skills Level 2 (English, Maths, ICT)

- **What it is:** Practical qualifications showing competence in everyday English, Maths, and ICT.
- **Subjects / focus:** Problem-solving, communication, handling money, writing, reading, and using technology.
- **How it's assessed:** Short written and practical tests when pupils are ready.
- **Entry requirements:** Usually completed after passing Functional Skills Level 1.
- **Leads to:** Further study at Level 3, apprenticeships, or employment requiring basic qualifications.



ASDAN Level 2

- **What it is:** Project-based qualifications that develop employability, teamwork, and personal development skills.
- **Subjects / focus:** Community involvement, work preparation, volunteering, communication, and independence.
- **How it's assessed:** Through a portfolio of evidence showing tasks and achievements (no formal exams).
- **Entry requirements:** Pupils should have completed ASDAN Level 1 or equivalent practical qualifications.
- **Leads to:** Vocational training, apprenticeships, or supported employment.



NVQ Level 2 (National Vocational Qualification)

- **What it is:** A work-based qualification that shows a learner can do a job to national standards.

- **Subjects / focus:** Health & Social Care, Childcare, Retail, Hospitality, Construction, or Administration.
- **How it's assessed:** On-the-job assessments and practical tasks observed by a qualified assessor.
- **Entry requirements:** Usually completed after Level 1 vocational training or as part of an apprenticeship.
- **Leads to:** Level 3 NVQs, advanced apprenticeships, or professional training.

Level 3 Qualifications and Apprenticeships

Advanced study for pupils who are confident, independent learners. Equivalent to A-Levels or advanced vocational study.

Examples:

A-Levels,



BTEC Level 3 Diplomas,



T-Levels,

Advanced Apprenticeships.



UAL Level 3 Diploma



OCR Cambridge Technical (Level 3)



NCFE Level 3 Applied General Qualifications



CACHE Level 3 Diplomas



City & Guilds / VTCT Technical Level 3 Qualifications

Subjects: Art & Design, Engineering, Health & Social Care, Business, Computing, Sport, Education, Childcare, Performing Arts, Construction.

Assessment: Mix of coursework, practical tasks, and written exams.

Next Steps: University, Higher Apprenticeships, or skilled employment

Encourage independence — managing time and workload is key for success at this level

A-Levels (Advanced Level Qualifications)

- **What it is:** Academic qualifications usually studied over two years at sixth form or college. Pupils choose three or four subjects to study in depth.
- **Subjects / focus:** English, Maths, Science, Art, Psychology, History, and many more.
- **How it's assessed:** Mainly through written exams at the end of the course.
- **Entry requirements:** Usually five GCSEs at grade 4 or above, including English and Maths. Some subjects may require a grade 6 or above in that subject.
- **Leads to:** University degrees, higher apprenticeships, or professional careers.

BTEC Level 3 Diplomas / Extended Diplomas

- **What it is:** Vocational qualifications focused on practical and work-related learning. Equivalent to A-Levels in size and value.
- **Subjects / focus:** Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, Engineering, IT, Sport, Performing Arts, and more.
- **How it's assessed:** Through coursework, projects, and practical assignments (no final written exams).
- **Entry requirements:** Usually Level 2 qualifications (e.g. GCSEs at grade 4 or above, or a BTEC Level 2 Diploma).
- **Leads to:** University, higher apprenticeships, or employment in related fields.

T-Levels (Technical Levels)

- **What it is:** New technical qualifications equivalent to three A-Levels, combining classroom study with real industry experience.
- **Subjects / focus:** Digital Production, Health and Science, Education, Construction, Engineering, and Business.
- **How it's assessed:** Through coursework, exams, and a mandatory 45-day work placement.

Entry requirements: Usually five GCSEs at grade 4 or above, including English and Maths, or a Level 2 vocational qualification.

Leads to: Skilled employment, higher apprenticeships, or university.

Advanced Apprenticeships (Level 3)

What it is: A combination of paid work and training, allowing learners to earn a wage while studying towards a qualification.

Subjects / focus: Construction, Engineering, Business, Health & Social Care, IT, Animal Care, and many more.

How it's assessed: Through on-the-job assessments, coursework, and sometimes short exams.

Entry requirements: Usually five GCSEs at grade 4 or above or a Level 2 qualification (such as a BTEC or NVQ).

Leads to: Higher apprenticeships, university-level study, or full-time employment.



UAL Level 3 Diploma / Extended Diploma (University of the Arts London)

What it is: A creative, skills-based qualification focused on practical learning in art, design, and media. Studied at college over one or two years.

Subjects / focus: Art & Design, Photography, Fashion, Graphics, Media, Games Design, Performing Arts, and other creative routes.

How it's assessed: 100% coursework. Students complete projects, research, experiments, and a final major project.

Entry requirements: Usually four or five GCSEs at grade 3–4 or above, plus a portfolio of artwork.

Leads to: University arts degrees, creative apprenticeships, foundation courses, or employment in creative industries.

OCR OCR Cambridge Technical (Level 3)

What it is: Vocational qualifications similar to BTECs, focused on practical skills and industry knowledge. Can be taken as a single qualification or combined with others.

Subjects / focus: Business, Health & Social Care, IT, Digital Media, Engineering, Science.

How it's assessed: Mainly coursework and practical assignments, with some controlled assessments.

Entry requirements: Usually four or five GCSEs at grade 4 or above.

Leads to: University courses, higher apprenticeships, or employment in related sectors.



NCFE Level 3 Applied General Qualifications

What it is: Vocational qualifications designed to give practical skills alongside academic understanding. Similar to BTECs but available in specific specialist areas.

Subjects / focus: Sport & Physical Activity, Uniformed Services, Business, Health & Social Care, Mental Health, Education.

How it's assessed: Coursework, research tasks, and practical assessments; some externally set assignments.

Entry requirements: Usually four or five GCSEs at grade 4 or above.

Leads to: University, employment in related fields, or higher apprenticeships.



CACHE Level 3 Diplomas (NCFE CACHE)

What it is: Specialist childcare and education qualifications widely recognised by employers. Often includes significant placement hours.

Subjects / focus: Childcare, Early Years Education, Supporting Teaching & Learning.

How it's assessed: Coursework, observation in placement settings, and practical evidence.

Entry requirements: Usually grade 4 or above in English and Maths, plus an interest or experience in childcare.

Leads to: Early Years Educator roles, teaching assistant roles, university degrees (e.g., childhood studies), or higher apprenticeships.



City & Guilds / VTCT Technical Level 3 Qualifications

What it is: Industry-focused vocational qualifications designed for practical, hands-on careers.

Subjects / focus: Hair & Beauty, Catering, Construction, Motor Vehicle, Plumbing, Electrical Installation, Animal Care.

How it's assessed: Practical assessments, skills demonstrations, portfolios, and some written assignments.

Entry requirements: Usually GCSE grade 3–4 or above; some pathways require an interview or skills test.

Leads to: Direct employment in skilled trades, higher apprenticeships, or further technical training.

University and Higher Apprenticeships (Levels 4–6)

After Level 3, pupils may move to higher education or advanced training. These qualifications build specialist knowledge for professional roles.

Examples:

Foundation Degrees,

HNC/HND,

Bachelor's Degrees,

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships.

Subjects: Aviation, Teaching, Nursing, Engineering, Business, Computing, Animal Care, Environmental Science, Art and Design.

Support: Universities provide reasonable adjustments and mentoring for students with EHCPs or additional needs.

Next Steps: Professional careers, postgraduate study, or skilled employment.

Encourage your child to visit open days — universities often have SEND-specific events

Foundation Degrees (FdA / FdSc – Level 4–5)

What it is: A two-year qualification that combines academic study with practical, work-related learning. Often taught at colleges in partnership with universities.

Subjects / focus: Art & Design, Early Years Education, Business, Health & Social Care, Engineering, and more.

How it's assessed: Coursework, projects, and practical assignments (usually no final exams).

Entry requirements: Usually **Level 3 qualifications** such as A-Levels, BTEC Level 3 Diplomas, or a T-Level. Some courses may also accept relevant work experience.

Leads to: A **top-up year** to gain a full Bachelor's Degree or skilled employment in the chosen field.

HNC / HND (Higher National Certificate / Diploma – Level 4–5)

What it is: Practical, career-focused qualifications designed to develop specialist industry skills.

Subjects / focus: Engineering, Business, Computing, Art & Design, Health & Social Care, Construction, and more.

How it's assessed: Coursework, practical projects, and presentations.

Entry requirements: Usually **Level 3 qualifications** (e.g. BTEC Level 3 Diploma or A-Levels) or relevant work experience.

Leads to: Employment, further study at university, or entry into the final year of a degree course.

Bachelor's Degrees (BA / BSc – Level 6)

What it is: A full university degree that usually takes three years to complete.

Subjects / focus: A wide range including Art, Science, Psychology, Education, Engineering, Business, and many others.

How it's assessed: Essays, projects, exams, and presentations depending on the subject.

Entry requirements: Typically Level 3 qualifications (three A-Levels, BTEC Level 3 Diploma, or a T-Level) with GCSE English and Maths (Grade 4+).

Leads to: Professional careers, postgraduate study, or higher apprenticeships.

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships (Level 4–7)

What it is: Work-based learning where students are employed and study part-time for a university-level qualification, paid for by the employer.

Subjects / focus: Engineering, Digital Technology, Business, Healthcare, Education, and more.

How it's assessed: On-the-job assessments, coursework, and university assignments.

Entry requirements: **Level 3 qualifications** such as A-Levels, BTECs, or T-Levels. Employers may also consider relevant work experience.

Leads to: Degree-level qualifications, professional careers, and often permanent employment with the same organisation.

Professional Careers – Next Steps

After completing higher education or training, young people can progress into professional careers in fields such as Education, Healthcare, Engineering, Creative Industries, and Business. These careers involve teamwork, leadership, and responsibility.

Every qualification achieved helps build towards independence and success — focus on progress, not just grades.

Each qualification represents progress — whether in confidence, skill, or independence.

Fernways supports every pupil to achieve qualifications that match their ability, interests, and future goals.

Our aim is to do this within the constraints of timetabling and while ensuring that we accommodate every pupil's individual needs.

What matters most is that each young person leaves feeling capable, confident, and ready for their next steps.

