

# Choosing a school for your child

**Sometimes choosing a school for your child is as easy as geography – the one closest to home is the right one. But for some families, school selection can be a more complicated decision.**

## About choosing a school for your child

Decisions about where your child goes to school are very personal and can be difficult. It's common and normal for parents to feel anxious about getting this decision right.



For some parents, the decision is simple. Their children go to the local public school – the school in the same government zone as their house. Other parents might want to look further afield at other government schools ('out-of area' schools) or private schools.

## Things to consider when choosing a school for your child

If you're looking beyond the local public school, think about what will work best for **your child's personality, strengths, needs and interests**. You might also consider how different schools' cultures and values sit with your family values and family life.

Here are some other things you could think about.

### Personal values and preferences

- Do you prefer public or private education?
- Do you want your child to have a religious education?
- Do you need to send your child to boarding school, or are you interested in educating your child at home?
- Are you interested in a particular teaching philosophy – for example, Steiner, Montessori or mainstream?

### Practical considerations

- How do things like the location of the school, cost or difficulty of travelling to and from the school, and public transport options affect you?
- Where are your child's friends going to school?
- Where do most of the children from your child's preschool go to school?
- Do you need before-school and after-school care for your child?

### School-specific factors

- How big is the school? How many children are enrolled there?
- What facilities does the school have to support your child's learning – playgrounds, library, music programs, clubs and sporting teams?
- What are the school's previous academic results? What about its performance in other areas like the arts, sport or community engagement?
- How well does the school support children with special needs, if your child has a disability, developmental delay, autism spectrum disorder or other need?

### School communication and connections

- What opportunities are there for parent and family involvement with the school, and how is communication between home and the school managed?
- Does the school have a connection with the local community?



Many parents worry they can't afford to send their child to the 'best' school in the area. Every school has strengths that will enhance your child's experience. Getting to know what those strengths are and how you can support them will benefit your child's education.

### Choosing a primary school

The following questions might be useful if you're thinking about primary schools:

- Will you and your child feel welcome at the school?
- Does the school offer a 'transition into school' program?
- What are your options for before and after school care?
- What approach does the school take to behaviour management?
- What do other parents you know think about the different schools in your area? What are their experiences?
- Does your child's preschool teacher have an opinion on which school might be the best fit for your child?

### Choosing a secondary school

These questions might help you decide which secondary school is best for your child.

#### Financial and practical considerations

- Are the school fees and other costs affordable?
- Are there any scholarship programs, and is your child eligible?
- What are the options for transport to and from school? Do they work for your family?

#### Academic and extracurricular considerations

- What are the school's admission procedures and entrance requirements?
- What study paths are available to your child at different schools – Higher School Certificate, Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, International Baccalaureate (IB), Vocational and Educational Training (VET) and so on?
- What languages and elective subjects does the school offer? How many subjects are available in the senior years?
- What extracurricular activities – sport, art, music, drama and so on – are available to suit your child's interests? What are the time and costs associated with these?
- Does the school offer extension or accelerated learning programs? If so, what are the selection criteria?
- Does the school offer extra support if it's needed – for example, English as a second language (ESL) classes, literacy and numeracy support programs, and support for children with health conditions, special needs and so on?
- Is a [selective entry school](#) a better option for your child?

#### Feelings and values

- How does the culture of the school match your family's values – for example, uniform policy, attendance, emphasis on academic achievement, compulsory weekend sport and so on?
- What school does your child want to go to, based on primary school friends, opportunities provided by the school, career aspirations, motivations and so on?

### Choosing schools: important facts and factors

Many parents worry about things like class size or whether a single-sex or co-educational school is best. They also want to know how to find out about a school's philosophy. Here are some answers that might guide your thinking.

#### Class size

There's no clear-cut answer to the question of whether students will do better in a smaller class. But teacher quality and working conditions for teachers – that is, being well supported by other staff and having access to resources – are likely to be more important than the number of students in the class.

### Single-sex or co-educational

It's up to you to choose what's best for your situation, because there's no conclusive evidence to say that single-sex education is better than [co-education](#).

Generally, whether a school is co-educational or single sex isn't as important as the school's quality of leadership, teachers and approach to teaching. Most families will have a personal view about the issue, which is linked to the personality of their child, the parents' own schooling experience and their family values.

### School culture or philosophy

Schools have individual and distinct cultures and [teaching philosophies](#). For example, some have a strong sports ethic, some follow a religious affiliation, and others promote individuality and artistic pursuits.

It all depends on what's important to you and your child. Are you looking for a school with a balanced sporting and academic approach, or one with strengths in artistic and musical areas, or in science and maths? An environment with a strong academic focus might be important to you, or perhaps one that teaches your child more about your religious views.

Most schools talk about their philosophies and approach in a document like a prospectus, handbook or charter. You might also find this information on the school website.



Before your school search starts, it could help to come up with a list of five things that are most important to you (and your child) in your choice of a school. As you go through the [school selection process](#), think about this list – you might want to add to or revise it as you gather more information.



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- ▶ Choosing primary schools: children with disability
- ▶ Choosing primary schools for children with autism spectrum disorder
- ▶ Choosing secondary schools for children with autism spectrum disorder
- ▶ Moving schools

### Web links

- ▶ My School

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