



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Sharon Witt

Which SCHOOL? Choosing the right fit for your child

Choosing a school for your child can be a challenging time for parents. Here are 4 key considerations when looking for a Primary or Secondary School for your child, and what to do if a school ends up being the wrong fit.

"We are the worst parents!!"

I received this message late one night after a couple had decided to change their child's school yet again, after a recent move did not go well.

It's not the first time a parent has struggled with the right fit for their child's schooling, and it certainly won't be the last. I reassured them that they were more than wonderful parents, and the very fact that they had listened to their child's voice and made a move to what they perceived as a more suitable school for their daughter, was in itself, an example of great parenting.

When I first went to school, there was just one local Primary School available, and that was it – complete with just two portable classrooms and around forty students tops!

Fast-forward forty years and the options available are vastly different.

Choosing a school that is the best fit for your child is not necessarily an easy task. Finding the 'right' school often causes a

great deal of angst in parents, particularly if it is their first child beginning their education. Here are some thoughts to consider when looking for either a Primary or Secondary School for your child:

What are your child's needs?

Before you even consider what school will best suit your child, it's important to really take the time and think about what needs your child has. You know them best. Are they highly social? If yes, they would probably cope well in a school that has a larger population rather than a smaller school. Are they highly creative? Do they get bored easily? If you feel that your child needs more stimulation than the average child, perhaps try and match them to a school that has a creative focus.

Are they shy or struggle in social situations? Perhaps a smaller, community school may better meet your child's needs.

Having said this, the majority of schools will cater to a range of abilities, strengths and challenges. Teachers are quite used to

working with a wide range of personalities and learning styles, and that's what makes our children great – their diversity!

If you have very limited options available to you, however, please don't worry. Most schools are fantastic learning environments and vibrant communities.

Look beyond the facade

Almost every school will put on their best show during Open Days or 'School at Work' mornings. This is when you get to see a school at its very best, with the programs, teachers and facilities all looking sparkling. It's fantastic to visit these open days as they give you a good overall feel for the school and its culture. However, if you are seriously considering a school for your child, book in a time to take a school tour on a normal school day, where you will get to observe students at work and the school running as per normal.

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What extra support might your child need?

If your child is just beginning school, their kindergarten or daycare teacher will hopefully be able to advise you in advance if they feel your child may need special assistance or care when starting school.

Similarly, if your child is entering High School, you may also need to consider what additional learning support they require if they have received assistance during their Primary years. The majority of schools will have support structures in place to assist those children with learning difficulties, however the extent of support available for your particular child's needs will need to be well communicated and assessed.

Cost and accessibility

Of course you need to consider the financial costs of sending your child to school. Obviously this may impact whether you choose to send your child to a government or private school. The choice is completely up to you. Sending your child to a private school as opposed to a public school does not necessarily guarantee a better education or smooth sailing for your child. However, you can ensure you enroll your child with a school that matches your family's specific religious views or core values if you do go private.

You will also need to consider the location of your child's school. Is it easily accessible by public transport if are unable to do the drop-offs and pick-ups?

When the school doesn't fit

Once you have chosen your child's school and they are into the swing of things, remember that no school is perfect and most children will experience hiccups along the thirteen odd years of schooling. If you become aware that things are not smooth sailing, ensure that you make contact with your child's teacher, head or department as soon as possible.

If you are able to, it is advisable to make a call to the school and book in a time to chat with your child's teacher. Straight after the bell goes at the end of a busy school day is not the best chance to get a teacher's full attention; the same goes for before school. If you are able, send a detailed email if you feel the issue is important or more complicated. This way you have time to collect your thoughts, your communication is in writing, and the teacher or school leader has an opportunity to address your concerns accordingly.

Remember, schools can only work with the information that is passed on to them. Communication is paramount!

Finally, know that despite doing your research and making the best decision at the time, sometimes a school may not turn out to be the best fit for your child or teenager. This is not something to beat yourself up over; it is an opportunity to regroup, reassess your child's needs and make the appropriate move if necessary. However, be slow to take a 'knee-jerk' reaction and pull your child out of school, unless of course it concerns their safety.

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