

Choosing your child's school

For some parents, choosing a school is as easy as geography – the one closest to home is the right one. For others, school selection can be a more complicated decision.

Your decision

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

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

Other factors you could take into account include:

- the facilities the school has to support your child's learning – such as playgrounds, library, home language support, music programs, clubs and sporting teams
- the opportunities for parent and family involvement with the school, and how communication between home and the school is managed
- the school's size and number of children enrolled
- the school's religious affiliation or otherwise
- your preference in relation to public versus private education
- the location of the school, cost or difficulty of travelling to and from the school, and public transport options
- your preferences or needs – for example, boarding, or the possibility of educating your child at home
- the connection between the school and the local community
- the schools' previous academic results or performance in other areas, such as the arts, sport or community engagement
- where your child's friends are going.



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 of school. 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 options are available for before and after school care? What do other parents you know think about the different schools in your area? What are their experiences?
- What approach does the school take to behaviour management?

Choosing a secondary school

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

- What are the school's admission procedures and entrance requirements?
- Are the school fees and other costs affordable?
- What study paths are available to your child at this school – Higher School Certificate, Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, International Baccalaureate (IB), Vocational and Educational Training (VET) and so on?
- 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 does your child want to do – based on primary school friends, opportunities provided by the school, career aspirations, motivations and so on?
- Are there any scholarship programs available to your child, and is your child eligible?
- 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 for children?
- Does the school offer extra support where needed – for example, English as a second language (ESL) classes, literacy and numeracy support programs, assistance for children with health conditions, special needs and so on?
- Is a [selective entry school](#) a better option for your child?

Important facts and factors

Many parents worry about factors such as class size, whether single-sex or co-ed is best, and how to get a handle on a school's philosophy. Here are some facts that might guide your thinking.

Class size

Some older research suggested that the ideal class size is 16 students to one teacher. But more recent research indicates that teacher quality and work-related conditions are more important than the number of students in the class.

Single-sex or co-educational

Generally, whether a school is [co-ed](#) 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 and their family values, and will choose what's best for their own situation.

School culture or philosophy

Schools have individual and distinct cultures and learning and [teaching philosophies](#). For example, some will have a strong sports ethic, some will 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 [curriculum](#) 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 provide an outline of their philosophies and approach in some form of documentation, often as a prospectus, handbook or charter.

For more tips see our article on [practical steps to school selection](#).



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 selection process, think about this list – you might want to add to or revise it as you gather more information.

Rated ★★★★★ (7 ratings)

GLOSSARY

selective entry school

Selective entry schools provide an educationally enriched environment for highly achieving, academically gifted students. These schools will have a centralised selection process to admit students (usually an entrance exam).

co-ed

Coeducational; education of both sexes in the same school and same classes.

philosophy

Teaching philosophy; a set of beliefs about teaching, reasons for teaching, and the approach used to teach students.

curriculum

The subjects offered at a school – for example, English, maths, business studies, religious studies, drama and so on.

More to explore

- ▶ Starting school
- ▶ Starting secondary school
- ▶ Moving schools
- ▶ Talking about school
- ▶ Problems at school: children 9-15 years

Web links

- ▶ Australian Schools Directory
- ▶ Private Schools Directory
- ▶ National Catholic Education Commission
- ▶ My School

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