

Year 12 outcomes reports

Information sheet

Advice choosing a secondary school

To varying degrees schools have a rich academic, spiritual, sporting and cultural life. The best school for a particular student is the one that has subjects and activities that match the student's temperament, interests and aspirations. Finding the best match requires parental judgments about all aspects of the school's life

Choosing a secondary school for your child can be daunting. For parents and carers who are new to the system it can seem like a complex maze; it is difficult to know what questions to ask to make an informed decision.

Many parents start by asking questions about the school. However, it's important that before you begin your search, you sort out in your own mind what your educational priorities are, and think about the personality, skills, strengths and weaknesses and needs of your child. Then you may have a clearer picture of the kind of school that will reflect your educational values and will suit your son or daughter.

For instance, a child who has brilliant practical or artistic skills but spends five years at a secondary school that offers only theoretical classroom learning, will probably have an unhappy and frustrating secondary school experience without the opportunity to show his or her full range of abilities.

Similarly, a child who is insecure and lacks confidence may feel intimidated and unable to work at his or her best in a highly competitive learning environment, while a child who excels academically may not enjoy an environment in which other students do not value academic rigour.

The OP factor

Many parents begin their search for a secondary school by asking, "What OPs did the school get last year?" One problem with this approach is that schools don't get OPs; students do. A school which has hardworking, talented students one year could have many students who achieve high OPs that year. The next year that same school with the same teachers, the same curriculum and the same ethos may have a very different group of students who achieve different results.

OPs are used for a tertiary selection rank for universities and TAFE colleges and are not meant to be the sole or main measure of academic success.

To find the school which best meets the needs of your child, you need to look beyond the numbers and ask some searching questions about the wider school curriculum and policies.

Questions to consider when choosing a school

Below are some questions to consider when choosing a secondary school for your son or daughter.

Please note: While most of the following information is general, it was written with specific reference to senior secondary schooling. The information is provided as a starting point for parents who may be new to the system and is not meant to be a definitive or comprehensive guide to choosing a school.

Academic environment

- What sort of learning environment is developed in the school?
- Does it foster academic achievement?
- Are all students encouraged and nurtured to achieve to the best of their ability?
- Will the learning environment suit your child?
- How does the school measure its academic success? Is this consistent with your ambition for your child and your child's aspirations?

Curriculum

- Are there particular subjects that your child would like to study?
- Is the range of subject offerings going to suit your child?
- Is your child interested in gaining vocational competencies while at school?

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships are available in many schools. Some schools have specialist programs in sports, music, dance, languages and information technology.

Assessment

- What is the school's assessment policy?
- How will your child be assessed at various stages at the different year levels?
- What if a student is ill and unable to attend a particular test or complete an assignment? Does the school have a special consideration policy for such occurrences?
- How are results of assessment reported to parents? When are reports issued?
- At what point will the school let you know if your child is having problems? How will they let you know?

Homework

- Does the school have a policy regarding homework? Do you support that policy?

Type of school

- Is religious denomination important to you?
- Would your child be better suited to a coeducational school or a single-sex school?
- Do you require boarding facilities for your child?
- Consider the size of the school; would your child be happy in a large school or more comfortable in a small school?

School's values and ethos

- Is the school's philosophy consistent with your own?
- Ask about the school's discipline policy and their pastoral care arrangements. Will these suit your child?
- How does the school deal with incidents such as bullying?
- Do you think an emphasis on school uniform is important? What is the school's policy?

Parent involvement

- Do you want to be actively involved in the school?
- Does the school encourage or expect parent involvement?

Location/convenience

- Will your child have to travel far? If so, are there implications for safety, fatigue and ability to participate in other activities?
- Is before and after school care an issue?

Extra-curricular opportunities

- Do you expect a school to offer a range of extra-curricular activities such as debating, musicals, outdoor education?
- What does the school offer? Will these be suitable for your child?
- What are the costs involved?
- Would your child have to travel off-campus to participate?

Consider also the more unusual opportunities, such as community aid programs, that might be available.

Facilities

- Does your child require particular facilities for sporting, music, information technology or other interests?
- What are the costs to parents?
- Does your child require wheelchair access or other provisions for disabilities?

Many schools have open days during which you can look at facilities such as classrooms, library, information technology equipment, buildings and grounds.

Special programs

- What does your child need? Consider what special support your child may require.

Some schools have special education units on the same campus. Many schools offer learning support programs for students experiencing difficulties. Some schools offer programs for gifted and talented children. Others offer extension subjects for students who excel in areas such as music or languages. Some schools operate an excellence program in a particular area such as dance or sport.

Expenses

Even schools that do not charge tuition fees may have fees and levies that you need to pay. Some schools have textbook schemes to help defray the cost of books and materials. Ask about likely expenses for excursions and school camps — and whether there is pressure for students to attend optional activities such as overseas trips for language study.

Finding out more information

Parents may find the following sources of information helpful:

- Websites:
 - Education Queensland's website has a directory of all primary and secondary schools in the state.
<www.education.qld.gov.au>
 - Queensland Catholic Education Commission's website lists Catholic systemic schools.
<www.qcec.qld.catholic.edu.au>
 - Independent Schools Queensland's website lists their affiliated independent schools.
<www.aisq.qld.edu.au>
 - Many schools have their own websites.
- Other sources:
 - Schools are listed in the phone book under "Schools".
 - All schools are required to publish annual reports, which include academic results.
 - Individual schools can supply information on curriculum, school policies, facilities and other matters, often in a prospectus.
 - School newsletters and magazines can be valuable sources of information.
 - For detailed information on a school's teaching and assessment plan, ask to see the work programs for particular subjects.