

How best to choose

School must fit the child

By Robyn Courtney

WITH about 9500 schools in Australia spanning the government and independent education sectors, parents face a diverse and sometimes overwhelming offering of education choices for their children.

For some it's as simple as choosing the school closest to home, but for others, school selection can be complicated.

With my background in education, I have been asked by parents on many occasions for advice as to the best school for their child.

Foremost in the decision making process is finding a school that is not necessarily labelled the 'best school' but a school that is the 'best fit' for your child.

Every child has individual characteristics, personality, strengths, needs and interests so it's important to choose a school that suits them.

I liken it to buying a car. There are many factors to consider before jumping into the first vehicle you see and driving away. Selecting a school is the same.

You need to be happy that the school matches your family life and family's values as well as meeting your child's educational needs, wants and aspirations.

Think about what will work best for your child and you.

Visit the school with your child to get a feel for it. Sometimes a school that looks good on paper doesn't give that warm, welcoming feeling when you step inside its gates.

The 'public versus private' debate may be a consideration, but you should ask the question, 'does the type of school create any significant advantage?'

For many families, more often than not it comes down to affordability of fees and other costs.

Parents should be mindful that the education road carries on for at least 13 years and need to ask if they are willing and able to financially go the distance if they choose private schooling.

Other factors to take into account that might help you decide which school is best for your child's learning are:

- class sizes
- facilities
- subjects and programs offered, such as science and technology, the arts, sport
- how communication between home and the school is managed
- options for travelling to and from school
- the school's previous academic results or performance in other areas
- the approach the school takes to behaviour management
- study paths available, eg,



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Vocational and Educational Training, scholarship programs

- support programs offered, eg, special needs
- quality of leadership, teachers and approach to teaching.

Ultimately, it all depends on what's important to you and your child.

Regardless of other people's opinions or a school's supposed reputation, choose what's best for them.

Shop around. Visit the schools you are considering.

Check out the My School website to search for information about government and non-government schools.

Collect each school's prospectus or handbook and compare.

Do not feel anxious. There is no right or wrong. Encourage your child to make the most of it.

If worse comes to worst, if there's a choice, your child can change schools.

