

## School selection: practical steps

Making choices about your child's education can be tricky. For many parents, the best school for their child will be their local government school. But if you're thinking about other options, here are some practical steps to make the process a little easier.

### Step 1: Consider your child and your family

- What do you want a school to do for your child?
- Does your child have special language, education or other needs? What's your child's preferred or best learning style?
- Is location a factor in your school choice? Does the school need to be within walking distance? Or does your child have special transportation needs?
- What are your child's views and feelings about the school?



### Step 2: Gather information about schools

- You can check out school options in much the same way as you would if you were buying a car or house. For example, you can make phone calls, talk to family and friends, look on the internet, collect written materials from schools, check public records, go to parent fairs, information sessions or open days, and look in the local paper.
- You can also contact your state education department (by phone or their website) to get a list of schools in your area or use the Australian Government's [My School](#) website to find government, Catholic and independent schools across Australia.

### Step 3: Visit and observe schools

- Contact the schools you're interested in and make an appointment to visit. If possible, tour the school during regular school hours and visit a few classes.
- Schedule an appointment with the school principal.
- Attend open days and any other school functions to gather information about the attitudes of staff, students and parents. Listen closely to what they say about the school. This is important in helping you to develop a [relationship with your child's school](#).

### Step 4: Apply to or enrol in the school(s) you choose

Most government schools accept applications and enrolments from the second term of the year before your child will start school – around May each year. Independent schools often have long waiting lists and require much earlier application and enrolment. You can contact schools directly

to find out about their requirements.

Consider applying to more than one school, in case your child doesn't get into your first choice.

You'll need to fill out an application/enrolment form with:

- your child's name, age and birth date (you'll also need to supply a copy of your child's birth certificate)
- your child's address and phone number
- your contact details
- health and welfare information that will help the school meet your child's individual needs.

Most government schools give preference to children who live within their area. If you want to enrol your child at a school out of your area, you'll need to apply to that school.

Some schools will ask you to pay some or all of a levy or contribution fee when you enrol your child.



For more information on points to consider in the decision-making process, you can read our article on [choosing your child's school](#).

### Frequently asked questions

How can I find out about the academic record of a particular school?

The [My School](#) website allows you to search for information about both government and non-government schools. You can find out how many students the school has, its attendance rates, its senior school outcomes and its national assessment results (for example, [NAPLAN](#)), compared with other similar schools.

Some states and territories might also have websites that list information about the academic records of schools in that state. You can access these through the appropriate education department in your state.

Do secondary schools take only students living in their local area?

Government secondary schools are separated into districts or zones, but it's not a requirement that students must live in that district to attend that school. How many places the school has, and whether your child meets other school-based requirements, will determine whether it can take your child. You should contact any school outside of your district to find out what you need to do if you're interested in your child going there.

How far in advance do we need to be thinking about choosing a secondary school?

You need to enrol your child in a government secondary school in May of their final primary school year (year 6 or grade 7, depending on which state you live in). There are lots of things to think about when it comes to your child's secondary schooling. You might want to start listing your priorities and gathering information while your child is in the second-to-last year of primary school.

My child wants to go to the same secondary school as friends, but it doesn't have a good reputation. What should I do?

The first thing is to reassure your child that going to different schools doesn't mean that she'll

lose touch with her friends. One of the advantages of secondary schooling is the opportunity to meet new people and create a widening friendship group.

The second issue is the school's 'reputation'. You might want to dig a bit further to find out more about this. Sometimes a school's reputation is based on a single incident or event that doesn't reflect the school as a whole. Other times schools have a reputation from the distant past that's no longer accurate. You could consider the following questions:

- Is what you're hearing about the school based on fact or opinion?
- Who are you hearing information from?
- Is the reputation based on old or recent developments at the school?
- Most importantly, how will the school's reputation impact on your child if he attends the school?



Regardless of friends or reputation, you need to be happy that the school matches your family's values and your child's learning preferences, and is the one that will give your child the most opportunities to achieve in her areas of interest.



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#### More to explore

- ▶ Starting school
- ▶ Starting secondary school
- ▶ Moving schools
- ▶ Talking about school
- ▶ Problems at school: children 9-15 years
- ▶ Secondary school transitions for teenagers with autism spectrum disorder

#### Web links

- ▶ NAPLAN 2011 – Information for Parents (PDF doc: size 246kb)

## GLOSSARY

### NAPLAN

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which commenced in Australian schools in 2008. Every year, all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed on the same days using national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy.

Last Updated  
15-03-2011

Last Reviewed  
10-05-2011

#### Acknowledgements

Centre for Adolescent Health, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, with contribution from The Education Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

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