

14 things
to consider
when
choosing a
school for
your son



Exploring the joys and
challenges of raising boys



1 Size

The strengths of a smaller school might include smaller classes, a strong school community, more opportunity to participate in team sports, and the ability to do whole-school activities with ease.

Large schools may offer different benefits, including broader subject choices and extracurricular activities, expanded facilities and more specialist programs.

Remember that a larger school is not necessarily less 'personal' - in fact, many larger schools have great structures in place to ensure that students feel well known. If possible, talk to students already at the school to find out whether they feel at home, and whether they are able to participate in the extracurricular activities they desire.

2 Location

The school's proximity to your house is always a consideration. Don't forget that your son will be travelling to school 5 days per week for 6 or 7 years.

If he can get himself to school and back easily it will make your life much easier. And if the trip to school is shorter rather than longer, it makes participation in before- and after-school activities more feasible.

And don't be afraid of public transport - some of the best friendships are forged on the bus or train and it's also a great way to foster a sense of independence.

3 Single-sex or co-ed?

There is no consistent evidence to show that students achieve higher academic results in single-sex schools (as opposed to co-educational schools).

However, don't discount other possible benefits of single-sex schools. A good girls' school has the advantage of being 100% focused on meeting the needs of girls, just as a great boys' school does the same for boys. And, as you no doubt already know, girls and boys are very different beings! The chance to be themselves without having to play the part they might think they have to play to impress others could be invaluable.

Also, be aware that in a boys' school, your son won't be necessarily segregated from the opposite sex. Most single-sex schools now run regular activities, and often classes, with a nearby girls' school, giving your son a chance to socialise with girls.

Of course, whether to send your son to a boys' school or a co-ed school is a personal decision, but make sure you do your research. It is worth visiting schools to learn more about this, talking to students in both single-sex and co-ed schools, and reading the work of experts.

4 Fees

Fees can vary enormously and affordability will likely be a big factor in choosing a school for your son. It is worth doing tours of both public and independent schools to get an idea of what different schools offer - it's all about value for money.

If you are interested in a particular independent school but not able to afford full fees, find out whether the school offers any scholarships. Scholarships are not always based exclusively on academic ability. There are likely to be some general excellence scholarships, some sport scholarships, some music scholarships, some Indigenous scholarships and others specific to the school. Check schools' websites at least a year before your son is due to begin secondary school, as scholarship testing may take place quite early on in the year.

Also be aware that most government schools also have some level of 'contributions' and require parents to fund items such as laptops and uniform.

5 Learning approach

Look at almost any school's website and the school's 'values' will be at the forefront. Values are all very well, but they tend to be the same from school to school. And who doesn't want their child to embody respect, integrity, courage, excellence, passion etc...?

What you really need to look at is the school's learning approach or teaching philosophy. Does it resonate with you? Would you be happy for your son to be guided by the principles advocated here?

6 Teacher support

Professor John Hattie, an internationally acclaimed researcher in education, found that many factors affect students' results, including the students themselves, their home environments, their school, the school principal and their peer group, but - most significantly - their teachers.

How well teachers are able to do their job depends on leadership, resources and policies in areas such as professional development and flexible work arrangements. The best way to find out about these areas is to talk to the teachers themselves - and not necessarily within earshot of the principal.

7 Career guidance

Your son is unlikely to spend his working life in a single career - today's school leavers will have, on average, 5 separate careers in their lifetime .

However, expert guidance in finding his initial pathway is invaluable. Ask whether the school employs a careers counsellor and whether the students have opportunities to hear from those in a diverse array of workplaces.

Many of the jobs our children will be doing don't even exist now, making an expert in career guidance at school even more important.

8 Student wellbeing

School is about so much more than educational learning. Even for an academically capable student, a school that fails to nurture students' wellbeing is inadequate.

Increasingly, schools are incorporating a range of wellbeing activities into their curriculums, including mindfulness, coaching and positive psychology. Ask about these.

9 Extracurricular activities

Is Saturday sport compulsory and does this suit your son? What activities exist if your son is academically strong? Are there science clubs? Art clubs? Chess? F1 in Schools™? Does the school engage in any community service activities? Are performing arts offered right through the school or just at some year levels?

Remember that your son may be interested in certain activities now, but these interests may change as he is exposed to different opportunities.

10 Individual learning differences

If your son is academically gifted, he may need the challenge of an accelerated program. Or if he struggles in some areas, extra support might be what he needs. If English isn't the first language in your home, what language support does the school offer?

Your son is different to every other boy. Think carefully about his specific needs and ask exactly how the school can meet them.

11 Parental involvement

Research shows that student outcomes improve when parents take an active interest and get involved in their son's learning journey. A partnership between the school, the student and the home is vital. Find out how, as a parent, you can be involved in the school.

Also, does the school-run parent-education sessions? Is there a strong parent community? If possible, speak to parents of boys already at the school.

12 What's your son's view?

Kids are generally quick to pick up on the vibe of a school. If possible, time your school visit to overlap a break (recess or lunchtime). This will give your son an initial sense of whether he will fit in and feel comfortable in the environment.

Your son is also likely to want to attend a school where at least some of his kinder or primary-school friends are going. To him, this may seem a large consideration. But...

13 Remember, you are still the parent

Although it might be a little difficult at first, kids are usually good - and fast - at making new friends (plus, they can still see their old friends outside school). The most important consideration is whether the school is right for your son - not whether his friends are going there.

In addition, starting at a new school without lots of previous school friends can offer a child a fresh start. Some boys are excited or relieved by the chance to redefine themselves - even if they can't articulate this.

14 What if I choose the wrong school?

Even after doing lots of homework, visiting schools and asking people for their opinion, you may choose a school that doesn't work for your son.

It happens. Don't beat yourself up. Do what you can to try and resolve any issues but if your son is truly unhappy, don't battle it out in a school that's not working for him.

Look at what hasn't worked and find a school that better meets his needs.

A happy child will thrive and the outcomes will be better for everyone.

**For more great advice please visit
the Understanding Boys website
or Facebook page.**