

# Using School Visits and Open Days to help you choose a school

By Katie Krats, JK Educate

In choosing a school for your child, there are many sources of information available, including:

- League tables
- GCSE and A level results and university places
- Ofsted or Independent Schools Council (ISC) inspection reports
- 'Word of mouth'
- The school prospectus and/or website
- The school visit (Open Days and private views)

All of these can be valuable, but the last one - visiting the school in person and speaking to teachers, pupils and the head teacher - can be both the most powerful and the hardest to objectively analyse. Visiting a school can dramatically change opinions formed from other information sources.

First impressions are very important. Just like buying a new house, you will get an immediate feel for a school. You will make judgements about the external architecture, the behaviour of the children and the pastoral care of the staff. Take time to weigh up all the different aspects of the school before making important decisions. Watch your child's responses to the school as you move around it: do they seem engaged, relaxed and enthusiastic?

## What to look for at school visits:

- Do the children interact well with their teachers?
- Does the Head seem at ease with the children - and know their names?
- Are teachers shouting?
- Are pupils busy working independently?
- Are the premises well maintained, safe and clean?
- Are pupils' books marked with constructive comments and suggestions?
- Are children given targets?
- Does the school offer a wide variety of extra curricular activities?
- Visiting the children's toilets can tell you a lot about the school - what are they like?
- Do classrooms look bright and cheery? Are the displays recent and representative of all children's work?



It is best to visit three or four schools to enable you to compare the options and to consider which one would best suit your child. To get an accurate reflection of everyday school life, try to visit during a normal school day and not just on a special Open Day.

## Questions to ask staff at school visits

- Would you send your child to this school?
- How do you deal with bullying?
- Is discipline a problem at this school?
- Staff and pupil turnover
- Strengths and weaknesses of the school
- What are the class sizes and how are they organised?
- What is the cultural/religious mix of the school and how is this reflected in the curriculum?
- Does the school have any special resources, e.g. a photography room?
- Is there an after school or homework club?
- Is there an active PTA?

## Questions to ask pupils at school visits

- Are you happy here?
- What happens if you misbehave?
- What are the best and worst things about this school?
- Have you ever had to deal with bullying?
- How do you travel to and from school?
- How easy was it to transfer from primary school?

It is easy to be impressed by excellent grounds and facilities, but try to stay focussed on what is important for the development of your own child's needs when choosing a school. Schools have different styles and it is important to choose one where your child feels comfortable and motivated. For example, some children prefer being big fish in small ponds; others prefer being small fish in big ponds. Remember: the "best school" is always the school that best suits your individual child: academically, socially, ethically and geographically!

JK Educate specialises in bespoke support for children's learning, with schools advice, child assessments, specialist subject tutoring, entrance exam preparation and study skills. Contact Katie on ☎ 3488 0754 or via ✉ [jkeducate.co.uk](mailto:jkeducate.co.uk)