

Choosing the right school for your child

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Deciding which school to send your child to can be a daunting experience. You will be trusting someone else to look after your “heart” for anything upwards of five hours. This time will be spent out of your control and the person you choose should be someone that you know can look after your little one as if they were their own child.

Physical, emotional and spiritual aspects should come into your decision-making. The development of the whole child is important, and you want to ensure that you are reaching your child’s heart as well as their brain. Finding a school or person like this is scary but not impossible.

Something to remember is that “Not every school is for every child”. In other words don’t expect that because a school was great for your nephew that your child will be happy there.

How do you know if it is the right school?

Don’t disregard your “gut feeling”. The moment you walk into a school you will feel whether it is right or not. Pray about it before you go see the school and ask for wisdom in the interaction.

The most important step in choosing a school is research. Spend time visiting schools and getting a feel for the school. Your best indicator of the right school is how you feel when you are there. If there is any niggling doubt then don’t assume it will go away, follow your instinct.

The school that insists that you make an appointment to view the school or only offers open days as opportunities to see the school, normally has something to hide. There should never be a “good”



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time to visit a school, you should just be able to pop in unannounced and see the raw environment. If you are wanting to see the principal, then finding a time that is convenient for him/her is advisable.

Alternatively, visit the school and then make an appointment for another day.

When visiting a school for the first time try and make note of the following points:

General Points

- Try to avoid visiting before 8:30 as most preschoolers are arriving and things are hectic trying to settle the children down. Similarly between 11:30 and 14:00 is normally nap time for preschools so you won't be able to see much of the routine or the classroom.
- Try to visit a school between 8:30 and 11:00. This way you will be able to see the teacher / child interaction, possibly the general discipline and the flow of the routine.
- Don't spend more than 5 minutes in a classroom as it is disruptive to the class and it isn't fair to the learning process to

linger. Follow the guide of the person allocated to showing you around the school.

Things to look for

- Insist on seeing both the kitchen and toilet facilities. This will tell you a lot about the general hygiene of a school.
- Ask questions regarding their evacuation procedures, security and illness policies. Take careful note of how easily these questions are answered as this will tell you if the staff are fully aware of the school policies or if an answer is being "made up".
- Observe the classroom lighting. A dingy classroom does not help learning and demotivates the children and staff. Lots of natural light is best but where not possible good lighting is important.
- Ask about the staff to child ratio. Is it within reason? Remember a big class is not necessarily a bad thing as long as they have the correct type of staff complement e.g. it is fine to have 16 learners per Grade R teacher, but it is



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not ok to have 28 learners with one teacher and general helper.

- When walking around, watch the children and the staff. What are the interactions like? Are the children happy, do they gravitate towards a teacher/staff member or tend to shy away?

Remember that one of the most important aspects of a preschool is that your child feels loved and valued. This comes directly from the teachers and staff.

Information to find out

- It is important to find out if the school is registered with the appropriate body, specifically the Departments of Education and Social Development. The school should be able to provide you with documentation to prove this registration. Merely asking the question will tell you if you need to ask for proof.

A school that fumbles over the answer probably isn't registered which ultimately means that they are not being held accountable to anyone.

- Ask to see the Food Safety certificate if food is prepared on the premises. This certificate should be displayed in the kitchen.
- Check the fire extinguishers. They should have been serviced within the last 12 months.

- Ask about the curriculum. All Grade R facilities (this is the year before Grade 1) should be following a registered curriculum and the school should be able to provide evidence of this.

While a lot of these points may seem like overkill, you can't ever be too safe when it comes to the welfare and education of your child. In all of this remember that your instinct is the best decision. If you, or more importantly your child, is not comfortable with a school then keep looking.



Find a school in which you can trust the principal and the teachers. They need to be open to communication and be committed to forging a path with you and your child.

Above all, find a school that will support you in your faith and how you want to raise your child. Just because a school reports to be Christian does not necessarily mean that they actively follow spiritual formation and live the life of Christ.