

How do you choose a good school for your child? By Sharon Ray.



Firstly, there are **practical considerations**, and then there are **ethical considerations**.

1) Practical concerns:

- i) **Proximity** is important, as your child has to sit in the car in traffic while you get them to school. So ideally, the school should not be too far from where you live or alternately from where you work.

But this is by no means the overriding consideration. If your child is unhappy or things are not what they should be at the school, then it is better to travel further and have a better situation.

- i) **Space available**, sunshine, green grass, space inside and outside.
- ii) **Cleanliness and hygiene**. Surfaces are clean and painted, Equipment is maintained and painted. Children have their faces wiped before they go home. Dirty clothes will only indicate that they have had a busy and fun filled day. Children will get dirty so that's actually a positive sign. Sand should be clean and covered. Ask how they keep their sand clean and hygienic. Today you get antibacterial powder that gets put into sand to kill germs.
- iii) **Safety** is exceptionally important. This means you should look at security of the school, height of the playground equipment, gates that are locked, swimming pools that have secure nets and gates, plants in the garden that are not toxic, grass or other landing sites that are not solid concrete below the jungle gym for instance. Are there dangerous areas which are obvious and are being ignored? E.g. a high staircase that the children have access to.
- iv) **Plenty of toys and equipment** to go around. Without broken wheels and sharp chipped edges everywhere. Toys are very expensive and so this indicates whether the broken equipment is discarded.
- v) **Is on-going maintenance evident?**
- vi) **Educational games** and equipment, variation in teaching equipment.
- vii) **Fun ideas for activities**. E.g. puppet shows.
- viii) **Are the teachers** trained appropriately for this age group, do they have **first aid** training that is current and up to date? Is there sufficient staff for the number of children? Once again, this is an interesting consideration, because it also depends on the staff involved. The strange thing is that - if there are too many people around diffusion of responsibility occurs and no one actually takes responsibility for ensuring that things get done, as they assume that someone else is doing it.

2) Ethical concerns:

It is not always necessary that a certain religious ideology be implemented in the school, as this can be done by the parents and the religious body involved e.g. the church they belong

to. But having **sound traditional values**, and ethical values are essential. The teachers themselves will be living according to what they believe and the children will be exposed to that ethos on a daily basis. So if they are narrow-minded or severely limited in their thinking, the children in turn will be narrowly restricted. **Good values would include concepts implemented in their teaching such as sharing, taking turns, honesty, respect for others, trying hard, perseverance, lack of violence in the interactions and play.** Not hurting others, not dominating others or subjecting them to your will. (Known as bullying).

- i) **Core beliefs regarding teaching principles are important**, such as how do you motivate children, the incidence of poor behaviour and how is it dealt with. What educational principles yield **success in learning**? Is **discipline** in its proper sense important in the school? By this I do not mean punishment. It means the creation of appropriate boundaries.
- ii) Are the children given the **opportunity for free choice**, of games, activities and art decoration? This encourages decision making and independence.
- iii) **Are the children happy**, what do the staff feel about a crying child?
- iv) What **rules** exist in the school? Are they appropriate?
- v) Is the **leadership effective and conspicuous**? Are the **staff motivated and happy**? Do children have opportunities to demonstrate leadership and develop presentation skills?
- vi) Does the **school show forward development and planning**? Have there been new developments in the school layout? Has there been new building, new play areas, new equipment purchased or developed? What improvements are underway or have been undertaken?
- vii) Does the school, **have a curriculum plan and goals** for the learners to achieve in all the different sectors of children's development? In other words, not only academic achievement but social skills too need to be taught.
- viii) **Communication** is essential between parents, teachers and the principal or other management figures. This includes access to them via cell phone numbers, e-mails, newsletters, and so on. Report cards, feedback, discussion about difficulties. Not wasting time, but meaningful discussions. The tone of the communication will also be evident; are the people involved in the school exuding positivity?
- ix) **Integrity and professional friendliness** should be reflected in the encounters between parents and management.
- x) **Are psychological techniques implemented and understood** by the staff in managing the children?
- xi) Is the leadership figure/ figures **passionate about education** and do they have firm ideas on what constitutes effective education?
- xii) **Do the children go on to succeed vigorously further on in their educational career?**