

## Here's what to consider while looking for admission of your child in school

*Apart from practical considerations such as budget, distance from home, transportation, etc., what should you look for now? What are those critical factors that could tip your decision towards one school or the other? Here are some useful pointers.*

Written by [Guest](#)

July 26, 2021 1:59:43 pm



The learning environment that a school provides is key to your child's learning journey.

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Choosing a school for your toddler can be one of the most stressful experiences of your life; after all, your child's future happiness depends on this one decision that you make. So you've spoken to trusted family members and friends and listened to their experiences, gathered up all the admissions brochures, consulted parent support groups/portals, trawled through school websites and arrived at a shortlist of possibilities. Apart from practical considerations such as budget, distance from home, transportation, etc., what should you look for now? What are those critical factors that could tip your decision towards one school or the other? Here are some useful pointers.

The school that your child goes to says quite a lot about you and your child in people's perception. It is natural for the reputation of the school to rub off on its students; for instance, if a school is known for producing toppers, the natural assumption is that its students are extremely studious with no extracurricular interests. It is therefore important to understand from parents/students what the public perception of the school is. However, the best way to check this aspect is to discover if the school is ranked nationally by a credible magazine or website, or organisation. Also, check its affiliations and accreditations as well as the educators and academicians associated with it to get a clear picture of its reputation in the community.

### **Cultural fit**

You know your child and you know yourself. You therefore have a clear idea of ethical and belief systems that resonate with you. You also know the importance of certain critical values and traits that you would desire your child to imbibe at home and in school. The best way to assess whether the school is a good cultural fit with you and your child is by talking to existing parents and students of the school. Gather information on whether the school has a robust social-emotional learning programme and a set of behavioural norms that it expects children and parents to abide by. Does the school have an overt culture of entitlement and competitiveness? Existing parents would be able to tell you if the school's interaction with them extends beyond exams, results and financials. Ask questions around the school's stand on bullying, screen time, birthday celebrations, inclusive practices, sustainability and parent involvement in community initiatives.

### **Learning environment**

The learning environment that a school provides is key to your child's learning journey. It includes the relationships that members of the learning community have within the framework of the institution. Physical, academic and social aspects determine the learning environment and have a direct impact on your child's well-being. You should focus on discovering answers to the following questions to identify the kind of environment the school has:

- Is the school's learning philosophy in sync with your view of life?
- Is the environment competitive or collaborative?
- Is there a right balance between excellence and achievement?
- Is each child's learning ability and individuality recognised or is there a one-size-fits-all approach?
- Do children enjoy classes or treat them as burdensome chores?
- Are children encouraged to be independent (for instance, can they do their homework or do they rely on adults to do it)?
- What is the teacher-student ratio? Are classes so overcrowded that the child has to fight for attention?

### **Agile curricula**

The curriculum is a deciding factor in how effectively learning is delivered to your child, and it needs to be agile to equip your child for the rapidly changing world. Considering the pace of change that we have been witnessing, your child will need to be ready to meet the demands of skills and the workplace when she graduates from school 14 years later. Schools across the Delhi NCR offer a range of curricula from CBSE to ICSE and Cambridge to IB. The national curricula, CBSE and ICSE, are open to being interpreted by some schools conservatively as focussing on rote-learning and exams and adapting to changing situations at a very slow pace. While looking at schools that offer CBSE/ICSE, choose one that has blended project-based learning with the national curriculum to achieve good learning outcomes. The international programmes (Cambridge and IB), on the other hand, have assessments and curricula that are less linear and more focused on real-life knowledge, thinking ability and applications of concepts across unfamiliar situations. So choose wisely.

### **Teaching and learning practices**

There are some standard phrases and words that most schools deploy these days — project-based learning, experiential learning, holistic development, digital learning, smart classes, etc. But you need to dig deeper to discover if these best practices are actually followed in the school. Ask school representatives about teaching and learning practices as well as approaches and methods. How is project work incorporated in and across subjects? Is there a strong focus on literacy and numeracy? Are the children exposed regularly, as part of their everyday schedule, to maker spaces, tinkering where they get the opportunity to find solutions to real-life problems? Cross-check this information with existing parents, to be certain.

### **Leadership and teacher empowerment**

A school's vision and strategic direction are important for its continued good performance. So look at the school leadership team and each member's educational and academic backgrounds as well as accomplishments in other fields. These would provide a good indication of how well the school will fare in the future. Since it is the teachers that translate the vision and philosophy of the school into reality and deploy teaching and learning practices in the classroom on an everyday basis, they hold the most importance in your child's development. It would be worthwhile for you to find out about the hours of professional development the teachers undergo in a year. This is an excellent



professional development the teachers undergo in a year. This is an excellent indication of the primacy the school places on empowering its teachers and equipping them to be the best at what they do. While assessing teacher proficiency, go beyond frivolous criteria such as language fluency. By far the more important criteria for you to look for are patience, care, empathy and the ability to build bonds with children.

### **Infrastructure**

You need to go beyond sporting, academic and co-curricular infrastructure and facilities to look at a few more telling aspects:

**Space design:** The design of a school is critical to the learning environment. The way space is designed should facilitate the learning and well-being of your child without overwhelming her senses. For instance, a space that has an abundance of bright colours typically assaults the child's senses while the use of muted pastels with an abundance of natural light and plants helps children.

**Optimal use of facilities:** The school's curriculum needs to be structured in a manner that your child can use these facilities meaningfully. Instead of looking for facilities, ask the school about its sports, arts and music programmes and this will give you a better answer on the use of these facilities.

**Indoor Treated Fresh Air:** On average, your child will be spending at least five hours a day surrounded by 30-35 children in a closed room. She must remain safe from harmful pollutants, considering the AQI levels in Delhi NCR. Check if the school is equipped with treated fresh air units that keep the pollutant levels in check in enclosed spaces.

**Safety:** Apart from CCTVs, transport-tracking applications, visitor management systems, etc., check if the school:  
Is well-lit with no dark corners or closed rooms that have no visibility or can be locked from the inside  
Has guards/supervisors who keep vigil in the corridors and through all areas  
Has regular training of guards and support staff on POCSO and handling of children along with yearly refreshers

### **Parent engagement**

Building a relationship with your child's school is akin to a marriage. When considering your choice, spend some time thinking about how your interaction was with the school. Were team members willing to talk to you and answer your questions? Was it easy to connect with the school and set up a meeting? Is the school leadership accessible and approachable? What kind of culture do you experience when you meet the school leadership? Does the school have a structured programme for parent engagement apart from the regular parent-teacher meetings? If you see any red flags in these areas, you may seriously consider if this is the school of your choice. After all, if the school is not willing to engage with you now, how do you expect to reach out to them easily in case of any problems or concerns you may face later?

But over and above all this, what is the top-most priority when choosing a school? You must choose a place where you feel your child will be happy, free and cared for. Avoid getting swayed by keeping up with your neighbours or hearsay but base your decision on how your child can benefit, learn and grow as an individual. And, of course, academics are important but your child's first experience at a school should foster a love of learning in her – and that can only happen in a place where she feels secure and joyful.

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