



### Boarding School Advice by Fiona Hodgkins

Helping parents choose the right school for their child has long been a passion of mine as a primary school teacher for over 25 years both in the UK and overseas; from moving my own three children in and out of thirteen different schools from Reception to Sixth form in six different countries over the last 15 years and most recently from helping children prepare for UK school entrance exams from here in Singapore.

The task of choosing the right school is hard enough when you are in the UK knowing your options, being able to ask around and getting advice from feeder prep and primary schools.

How much bigger the task then is when you are overseas, in a less familiar environment, potentially out of the information loop and possibly looking at a wider choice of schools both geographical and otherwise.

My first mantra when approaching the task of choosing a school is to remember that the best school in the land may not be the best school for your child. Reputation, anecdotal recommendations and academic league tables will often be the first things parents will consider and whilst at face value they do serve some interest, what is more important is to consider how well your child will do in a particular school. Put simply, just because a friend's child did well at a school and 80% of students achieve A/A\* at GCSE is no guarantee that your child will achieve that if it is not the right school for them. Being aware therefore of your child's character, learning styles and academic levels (both in terms of achievement and attainment) and the academic ethos of a particular school are essential in helping you assess if a school is right for them.

Once parents have come up with a suitable short list of schools to consider based on the academic environment of a school, plus of course personal preferences such

as geographical considerations, co-ed/single sex, boarding/day and size (and there are many pros and cons for each of these in different circumstances) plus any other requirements (though at this stage I do recommend a fairly flexible outlook) then preparing well for a school visit is crucial.

When you look at a prospectus, website or ultimately visit a school, understandably they want to show you what they want you to see, perhaps a new sixth form centre or their state of the art IT facilities. As you are wowed by what you are being shown, it is very easy to lose your focus on what you want to see and find out specific to your child's needs. I aim to empower parents so that they approach any visit with their own agenda which will help ensure that they look for and are shown what they want to see and get responses to the specific questions they need answered in order to make an informed decision for their child.

Above all, my advice to parents is to be honest about your child's strengths and weaknesses: at the end of the day, the right school should want your child as much as you want your child to be there and when you get the right fit, a lot of the angst goes from both the process of choosing the school and the subsequent entry procedures. Ultimately, if you get the formula right, both you and your child will be happy and they will achieve their best.

Fiona Hodgkins is a BA member who over the last 5 years has written a number of articles on a variety of topics for the BEAM. Having taught at Tanglin Trust School she now runs Ellipsis Learning and Educational Consultancy, tutoring mainstream children (mainly aged 10 to 13) and advising parents on school choices in the UK and elsewhere. If you would like more information contact [ellipsislearning@gmail.com](mailto:ellipsislearning@gmail.com)

