

Choosing an International School

Moving overseas can be overwhelming and filled with so many decisions. No decision will be more important than finding a school to meet your child's needs. Take the time to make an informed decision--the quality of your child's education WILL impact his/her future. You will never regret the time you invested in making the right decision and providing the very best education for your child.

The following checklist is designed to help you make an informed decision about the right school for your child. It is important to ask questions and to ask for documentation to back up any claims a school makes. The following are some factors you may wish to consider in your quest:

YOUR CHILD

- Does the school have planned activities to assist your child in a positive start to school?
- Are new students assigned "buddies"?
- What are the class sizes (not the same as student-teacher ratio)?
- Does the school allow parents to volunteer in the classrooms or to eat lunch with their children?
- How does the school deal with bullying?
- What programs are in place for drug and alcohol prevention?
- What student-support services are available for individual counseling or university acceptances?
- Do the students look actively engaged in learning?
- How often will you receive information concerning your child's progress?
- Are the students happy at school?
- What is the average time spent on homework?

CURRICULUM

- Is the approach child-centered and challenging enough to develop each child's strengths and love of learning?
- Are the course offerings extensive enough to meet your child's needs?
- At what age are students offered modern languages?
- How many co-curricular activities (arts, sports, clubs, community service) are offered?
- What documentation does the school provide that the curriculum reflects the latest in content?
- What types of standardized tests are offered, and how do the students perform?
- In the last year, what universities accepted the school's graduates?
- Does the school restrict students from trying advanced courses in high school?

- Is the curriculum broadened with “best practices” around the world, so students can be well prepared for their next school?
- How does the curriculum compare with a U.S. Public school curriculum? Are there any courses not offered by the school that a child would need to graduate from a high school in the United States?

STAFF

- Are all the teachers certified, including ESL teachers?
- What are the expectations for staff about students of high ability, special needs, ESL, other areas?
- How long on average does the school retain its teachers?
- What percentage of teachers has earned advanced degrees?
- What percentage of instructional assistants holds university degrees?
- Does the school support professional development, so teachers learn and apply “best practices”?
- Is time dedicated for teachers to meet as teams to jointly plan curriculum and assess each child’s needs?
- Does the staff seem happy?

COMMUNITY

- What security precautions is the school taking?
- What is the quality of air, water, and noise around the school?
- Is the community surrounding the school residential or commercial or inner-city?
- What international or national sports and arts leagues is the school a member?
- What types of field trips are available for students? Are they mandatory? What is the cost? Are the costs included as part of the school’s tuition?
- Does the school offer after-school/weekend activities for the community? What is the cost?
- Does the school offer adult-education classes for parents?

FACILITIES

- How long does it take for your child to get to school? Is transportation provided?
- Does the school provide lunch? Breakfast? What is the cost? Is it included in the tuition? NDSP does not reimburse for meals. *If the cost is included in the tuition, NDSP will subtract the amount of lunch out of the tuition and that will not be paid.*
- Are all facilities state-of-the-art and well maintained?
- How are the computer resources and wireless technology in use in the classroom?
- Will I be required to purchase a personal computing device for my child? If so, what is the cost?

- Does the school provide different facilities, such as libraries (books), cafeterias, and sport areas for different grade levels?
- What facilities are open to family members?

THE SCHOOL

- Is the school a for-profit school?
- How many years has the school existed?
- What is the annual tuition and what is included in the tuition? Are the cost tuition, transportation and fees within your Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR) education allowance for the city listed on the sponsor's orders? *Please be aware that you will be responsible for any fees incurred above the DSSR rate. Check your DSSR rate here:*
http://aoprals.state.gov/Web920/location.asp?menu_id=95
- What calendar does the school follow? Consider the impact on your child's transition. Special attention is needed especially if you are transferring to the southern hemisphere.
 - If the school follows a southern hemisphere school schedule, what is the policy or procedure for placing children in a particular grade?
- How does the school place children? Do they place them according to age only? Do they do placement testing? Do they use incoming transcripts?
- Is the school board run by parents who are elected?
- Is it accredited? What is the reputation of the accrediting institution(s)?
- What is the duration for the current school accreditation?
- Is the campus a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment?
- What is provided for new students and their parents?
- What is the "feeling" or "tone" of the staff? Are they friendly and professional?
- Was the annual report with budgets available for you to inspect?
- Were all questions answered in a straight-forward manner with documentation readily offered for claims?

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