



Make the right choice

The Archant Good Schools Show's official Education Advisor, Sue Laidlaw of Laidlaw Education, reflects on good school choices

Today is a momentous day in our house. Daughter number three has happily run into our local junior school, lunch box in hand, for the very last time! Her parents, just a little dewy-eyed, raise their breakfast mugs in celebration that here endeth 15 unbroken years of the primary school life.

So, today, I join the collective sigh of relief that our child has passed through that rite of passage containing school visits, application forms, interviews, exams, the fat envelope of success on the door mat - and that coveted place at the school of choice.

Sitting in my office each week, I am able to listen, with understanding, to the many parents that have worries and concerns that they wish to discuss, regarding the education of their children:

How do I find a suitable school?

Does he need tuition?

My daughter is very sporty. Where would be best for her?

What about the interview?

If she's good at Maths, but not good at Comprehension, will it matter?

However, it is not surprising that, living in these parts of London, the over-riding concerns that are voiced are often with regard to which is the "best" school for the child.

We all know that every child is different. Realistically, we all have strengths and weaknesses. It is on this basis that we listen with an understanding, but professional, ear to the requirements of each child and the concerns of each parent.

We are very fortunate indeed to live within travelling distance of so many wonderful schools. Many of them have nationally renowned academic records frequently at the top of league tables for GCSE and A level results. As a family, we have had the opportunity to experience life at such schools, first hand. There are other schools in the vicinity that are clearly less academically robust, smaller and may, at first glance, appear to offer less.

However, through many years of work in education, initially teaching for a decade in top London day schools and then consulting and guiding parents through the maze of school choices available, one salient point is very clear. We, as parents, want the best for our children; we want them to be the best that they can be, academically, in sport, music and art and, hopefully, even more importantly, to be happy rounded people. This can only be achieved by finding the right match of both child to school and school to child. Crucially, this can sometimes mean putting aside our own preconceived goals and expectations.

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In short, the best thing that we, parents and advisors, can do for our children is to be realistic and honest about the school choices that are right for each one as an individual. In London, there is no doubt that competition is often fierce for places in schools. Multiple applications are necessary and options clearly need to be covered.

However, once we look clearly and realistically at what type of environment would suit our child best, it becomes easier to see through the haze of dinner party conversation and the like. Early visits to schools help to make things clearer and the first stage is often to consider whether you, as parents, feel comfortable and happy in the surrounding of the school. If you feel at home, the chances are that your child will feel the same. Academic suitability is obviously vital but there are many other factors that are important, too.

Round pegs in round holes and square pegs in square ones are very likely to grow into confident, happy young adults - with the best results and qualifications that they could possibly achieve!

Visit Sue Laidlaw on Stand 67 and book your free 15 minute consultation to discuss your child's needs via www.thearchantgoodschoolsshow.co.uk (www.laidlaweducation.co.uk, 020 8487 9517)