



# SMART CHOICES

## With limited places for non-Cantonese speaking children in Hong Kong, choosing the right school for your child isn't as easy as you might think.

By Anne Murphy

DEMAND FOR SCHOOL places in Hong Kong is greater than ever as families continue to settle in the city and insist on the highest quality education for their children. This means that international schools are becoming more selective, ultimately making it more competitive for applicants.

Children as young as three years old are being put through interviews. As part of the primary school application process they're invited to a 30-40 minute interview and tested on name writing, number and letter recognition as well as their ability to follow instructions, take turns and play co-operatively, share, and help when required. Additionally, many international schools in Hong Kong will ask for a school report from your child's pre-school while some will ask teachers to complete a reference form highlighting a child's strengths, weaknesses, and personality traits.

While Hong Kong's government schools are regarded as some of the best academically, children will have no chance in the public schools unless they are able to speak Cantonese, or are very young and able to pick it up. This means that often the only option for those who wish to be taught in English is to go to an international or private independent school. There are lots of international schools in Hong Kong to choose from which follow the British, American, IB or Australian education systems. Undoubtedly, you'll want your child to attend the best school available but it's important to choose a school that's the right fit for your child and for you as a parent, even if an English medium school is your only choice.

There are many factors that parents may consider when trying to choose the best school for their children. However, the truth is that there isn't any school that's best for every child. We can look at exam results to determine the best school, but the real challenge for parents is to choose the right school.

### CHOOSING A SCHOOL

Choosing a school is a complex decision that includes plenty of intangible factors and elements that are hard, if not impossible, to properly define and quantify. In addition, you're trying to predict the future development and ability of your child, which is of course very difficult. And the younger the child - and the further ahead the projection - the more difficult the task. The characteristics of the child, the school quality, curriculum, school facilities, languages taught and after-school activities - not all easily measurable, and not all equally important for each individual child or family - play a role somewhere. Here are some tips for making the decision, but don't beat yourself up too much about trying to make a perfect decision - you can't - but you can narrow the margins for error.

### DEFINE YOUR IDEAL SCHOOL

Refine your search by considering what's important to you, whether it's maths, foreign languages, art, drama, after-school clubs or special education resources. Educate yourself on different teaching methods and consider how your child learns best. It's important to consider what's important to you in an academic programme. How rigorous should academics be? Would your child thrive in a traditional setting or is a more creative approach better.

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### VISIT BEFORE YOU DECIDE

It's extremely important to visit as many schools as possible, so that when you make a choice you're satisfied with the school you've chosen not only on academics. When you tour the school, check out the work on the walls, classroom set-up, facilities, play areas and how teachers and children interact, and also what type of involvement the school wants from parents. Open Days are held at most international schools on a monthly basis. In general, admission officers are happy to organize private tours with a principal or vice principal – but give them plenty of notice. Many pre-schools offer trial lessons and allow parents to observe classes.

### KNOW HOW TO APPLY, AND WHEN

Find out deadlines for applications, enrolment and debenture information as soon as possible, and don't be late. Some schools start applications at 3 years old (Pre Reception) and others at 5 years old (Primary). Certain schools such as French International, German Swiss and Kellett accept applications from birth. Waiting lists at these schools can reach 300 + for Reception, however, only 60 places are offered. If you miss a deadline, your application is filed under a 'late list' which means your child may never be offered an interview let alone a space. *Apply to as many schools as you feel would suit your child.*

### HAVE A BACKUP PLAN

Your child may not be called for an interview or classes might be full to capacity. Remain on the waiting list, if you can, and be ready to consider your second or third-choice schools. Don't put all your eggs into one basket. Although you may only truly want to send your child to your first choice- school, it may well be that you're never

offered a space. Due to the increase of applications received by ESF over the past few years for P1 places, many children have not even been offered an interview, which has left many parents unhappy and with few options. So, it's very important to consider as many schools as possible. Parents are often surprised what other schools can offer once they open their minds to different options.

### ASK FOR HELP

If you're unsure about your choices and find it difficult to navigate the entire process, seek advice from an education consultant. An education consultant can assist you by helping you find a school placement that is a good fit for your child. Apart from giving you more schooling options to choose from, an experienced consultant will give you peace of mind especially if you're relocating your family to Hong Kong. An educational consultant is a resource to help guide you through the maze of school admissions. They can help you plan ahead so you won't miss deadlines, provide you with in-depth knowledge on the schools and curriculum, prepare your child for interviews and assessments and most importantly, give you professional support to ensure your child has a successful outcome. Finally, you have access to expertise and practical help for one of the most important decisions your family will make.

Choosing the right school takes much time and effort. It's important to do your homework before choosing the best school for you and your child so you get the best possible match. Which is the right school? It's the one that fits best with your needs and requirements. It's the school where your child will thrive and will be happiest.

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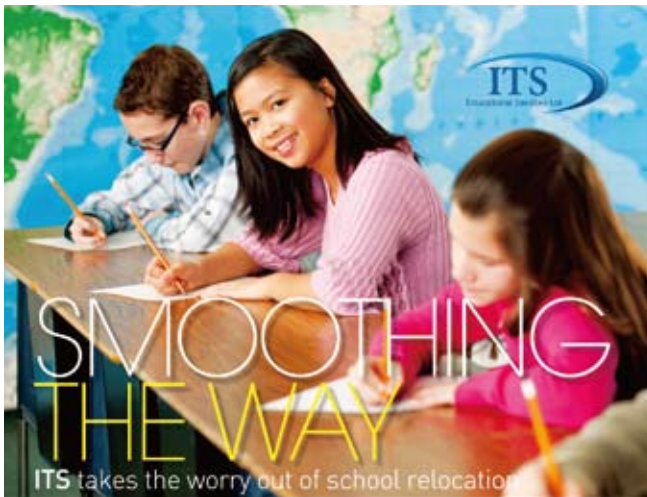


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