

# Discovering the junior school

*Younger students and their families have unique needs when it comes to choosing the right school, writes Larissa Ham.*

Is choosing a junior school for your child really that different to selecting a senior school?

Or are there certain considerations that families with younger children should bear in mind – particularly if you want to get the most out of school open days, tours or information sessions?

Westbourne Grammar School associate principal Teagan Collins says all schools are communities, and that selecting the right one for your child is a significant decision – regardless of whether it’s at the junior or senior level.

“But particularly for junior school, it’s such a significant time of growth and development for young children at that age.”

Collins says the early years of schooling are vital in setting up a child for success throughout their education.

“There’s really critical foundational elements of a child’s education that are laid in their early years, particularly foundational numeracy and literacy, their emotional development and health literacy.”

Chris Toms, the vice-principal and head of junior school at Lauriston Girls’ School, agrees that it’s all about laying down the groundwork.

“It’s all about building those basic skills, making sure the students love learning, and helping them navigate the social and emotional challenges.”

He says parents considering sending their young child to Lauriston usually want to know how the school approaches early education, what the atmosphere is like, and whether the quality of the teaching is high.

That differs a little from families considering senior school options, when priorities tend to shift.

“Of course, we still care about the basics, but parents are more interested in the academic path for their kids,” says Toms.

“They might be asking themselves whether the VCE or International Baccalaureate might be better for their child.”

While some parents are very interested in academic results when choosing a junior school, Toms says there are also many other factors to consider, such as the school’s values, educational philosophy and curriculum.

There’s also pastoral care, parental involvement and the types of extra-curricular activities available.

With all the choices on offer, it can be easy to start feeling a little overwhelmed about the decision.



Westbourne Grammar School advises parents to take their child to open days and try to see the school through their eyes.

However thinking ahead about the types of questions you’d like to ask when you visit a school can definitely help, as can attending multiple events.

Collins says Westbourne gets plenty of questions about culture, and how students are supported emotionally and socially. Parents are also very keen to find out what programs the school

has to help their child reach their full potential (or the type of support available if they aren’t on track).

Collins suggests going into open days or tours with a sense of curiosity. Ask the staff plenty of questions, but also seek students’ first-hand experiences.

“Ask them what their experience has

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CHRIS TOMS

information session, Toms says there are plenty of questions parents can think about asking, such as:

- What are the benefits of private schools versus public schools for junior students?
- What specialist subjects do the students learn?
- How do you cater for students who are below or above the expected level?
- How can I be involved in the school community?
- What pastoral support is offered, and what is your wellbeing curriculum?
- How do you manage issues of bullying and poor behaviour from students?

Toms says that ultimately, the decision depends on which factors are important to your family – and the type of school that will best fit your child's individual needs and personality.

And if at any point, you still have questions that remain unanswered, don't be afraid to reach out to a school after a tour or open day, says Collins.

"People in schools I know are very happy to continue the conversation because we understand how significant the decision is."

been like, and how they've found the school, and what they love about the school."

To find out more about a school's culture, Collins recommends taking a good look around, and noticing the "micro-moments" – for example those small interactions between students, and between teachers and students.

As for investigating the quality of teaching, a wise approach is to inquire

about the types of professional learning opportunities and other development provided to staff, she says.

Asking what kind of alumni program a school offers is also important, she says, because that may lead to continued connections, networking opportunities and support far beyond the school gates.

When it comes to involving your child in the junior school decision, it

can be tricky, mostly because they are so young when they join a school's waiting list.

However Collins suggests taking your child along to open days, and trying to see things through their eyes.

"Generally, if you're feeling safe and comfortable and have confidence in the school choice, then your child will have that too," she says.

Before attending an open day or

Chris Toms, the vice-principal and head of junior school at Lauriston Girls' School, believes it is important to lay groundwork.



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