

eGuide

***TOP 10 TIPS ON HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT
BOARDING SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD***

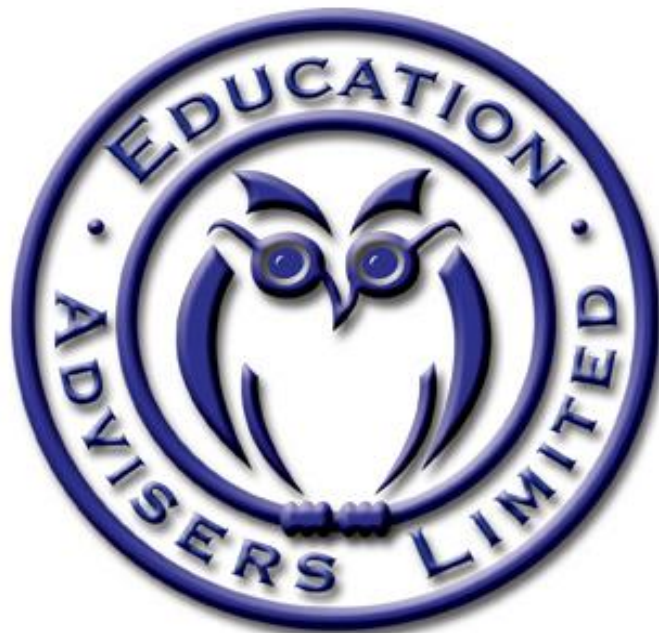
(including 30 point questionnaire for school visit)

Best Boarding Schools

From

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UK Boarding Schools

This eGuide is divided into 4 parts

- *An introduction*
- *Brief list of Top 10 Tips*
- *Detailed explanation of Top 10 Tips*
- *30 point checklist to take on school visits*

If you are experienced in private education or have little time, you may wish to just consider only the second and fourth sections

UK Boarding Schools – An Introduction

Before we get to our top 10 tips, a few words about UK boarding schools. There are around 800 independent schools which offer boarding accommodation for pupils. The majority cater for the senior life stage (11 to 18) but there are a modest number of preparatory boarding schools (7 to 11) and a much smaller number of boarding pre-preps (3 to 7).

There are a number of different forms of boarding, for example:

- Full board is usually 7 days per week accommodation and meals
- Flexi or weekly board is typically boarding from Monday to Friday or Saturday allowing pupils to return home for weekends
- Home stay is accommodation arranged with local families
- Dedicated student accommodation is university style halls of residence in sixth form colleges

Boarding schools range from the huge (1000+ pupils) well known public schools like Eton or Millfield to medium sized (500 pupils) schools like Queen Ethelburga's (where pupils can take their own horse for free) to more modest niche boarding schools (>150 pupils) like Woodcote House, a prep boarding school in Surrey. A majority of boarding schools are not found in city centres, but in magnificent country estates, where they often have room to erect purpose built accommodation blocks or large theatres and sports facilities to add to the wide range of extra activities available to pupils.

Full time boarders can have action packed weekends. Sometimes there are Saturday morning lessons, but this is now less common. Many attend chapel on Sunday. Then there are many events such as sports fixtures, theatre outings, walking, sailing and weekend trips.

Boarding has changed dramatically in the last 30 years. The accommodation is much more modern and spacious. Yes, there are still some dormitories of up to 8 beds, but not like the Charles Dickens stereotyped image. As pupils move into senior classes

they usually have the option of single or dual shared rooms with their own private area and space. It invariably becomes a great lesson in life skills, living close together with others and making friends for life.

There are numerous factors by which you can judge a boarding school – not just academic success, but let's start by outlining our top 10 Tips before going into detail and then ending up with a 30 point questionnaire you can take on the visits to your short list schools.

- 1. Does the school fit the basic requirements of you and your child?**
 - Age range, gender, day/boarding mix, religious denomination, type of qualifications to be achieved, subjects offered
 - Day/boarding pupil mix
- 2. Will your child be happy there?**
 - Ethos, style, academic or broad range, teaching style, special interests
- 3. Does it have a good academic track record?**
 - Exam success, high or low pressure environment, leaver destinations, teaching quality
- 4. Do the accommodation options suit you?**
 - Dormitories, rooms, facilities, meals, supervision
- 5. Do you like the ethos of school?**
 - Invariably set by the Head
- 6. What are the pastoral care and guardianship facilities like?**
 - Care from house heads, medical care, discipline, out of hours interests and supervision
- 7. Does the school have the facilities your child needs?**
 - Swimming pool, theatre, music etc
- 8. Does it have extra curricular activities your child would use?**
 - Range of activities, costs
- 9. Is the location optimum for you?**
 - How important is area?
- 10. Does it give YOU value for money for what you want?**
 - Value for service delivered, fit with your budget, extras

1. Your basic requirements

1.1 Starting Age

The main part of the www.best-schools.co.uk website concentrates on senior schools, which take entry from age 11 or 13 (and also at 16) because it is only in this category we can measure exam success. However, we now list many of the schools which have pre-preparatory (ages 2/3 to 7) or preparatory (ages 7 to 11) entry. If you have a child younger than 11 and you have your sights set on a particular senior school only, you

might wish to find a prep school which acts as a feeder school to your chosen senior school. If you need boarding for under age 11 your choice will be more limited.

The advantage of being in an “all through” is that your child tends to progress naturally into the senior school. If you are “on the outside” there might be a waiting list. On the other hand, children can find it stifling being at the same school for 15 years. Will the school that was right for your 3 year old still be right at 16?

The majority of senior boarding schools state that their admissions procedure requires the successful passing of the Common Entrance Exam, typically taken in January for admission the following September at age 11, 12 or 13. Be sure they are well prepared for it and find out what the pass mark will be – it can vary from 45% to 75%. However, there are often special admission processes for sixth form entry and International pupils. Talk to us on 0845 26 28 20 if you have a problem.

1.2 Gender

There are of course girls only and boys only school, but there is a definite trend to go co-ed. The arguments rage about the merits of single sex education with many Heads claiming there is no difference in academic achievement in single sex schools. However, this is a difficult premise to support, when there is very strong evidence that girls only schools do produce the best A level performance.

A significant number of single sex schools have been converting to co-ed in their sixth forms on the basis that it is time to prepare students for the reality of the outside world. However, a politically incorrect view is that some single sex schools have been losing so many pupils at age 16 (because the pupils themselves harass their parents to transfer to co-ed schools) that they have had no option but to go co-ed because of the commercial pressures. Of course, almost all single sex schools arrange social functions and also sometimes mixed lessons with neighbouring schools of the opposite gender.

At the end of the day, this is very much down to parent’s preferences. Do not be afraid to discuss the subject with the school on your visit.

1.3 Religious Denomination

Most schools will originally start from one faith – you will find Church of England, Roman Catholic, Quaker, Methodist, Jewish and Muslim etc. You will also find that most schools will accept pupils of any faith. If your views are particularly strong, then discuss them with the school. For example if you are CoE sending your child to a Catholic School, they will likely insist all pupils will attend Mass.

There are an increasing number of Muslim schools, but still relatively few at the senior school life stages.

In this day and age, most schools are becoming non denominational and respecting all faiths.

1.4 Subjects taught

At the younger life stages, this is not much of an issue, except for those opting for the International Baccalaureate.

By the age of 14 or 15, strengths or preferences are beginning to emerge, particularly with a view to A level choices, university and career aspirations.

The typical school might offer between 20 to 28 different A level subjects – the larger the school, generally the larger the options.

Most schools are going to offer all of the academic subjects, but they may not offer say - particular languages or performing arts subjects. If your child is old enough to have particular aspirations, it is not difficult to find a school with the required subjects, but all is not lost if the interest develops later on – it is quite easy to transfer to an independent sixth form college at 16 or 17 (see www.sixth-form.com)

1.5 Proportion of day and boarding pupils

If you are looking to board a child, we would recommend caution if less than 25% (or 50 in number) are boarding, because it is not a true boarding school and will be rather deserted at weekends when the day pupils leave. This is not an absolute rule and indeed cost may be a factor because such smaller schools will usually be cheaper. We simply point out that your child does need companionship at the weekends and a variety of activities to keep them interested and happy.

2. Will your child be happy?

2.1 How will you know if your child will be happy?

Of course, it is vital that your child is happy, especially if this is their first experience of boarding.

Of course, you are not going to know the answer until after they get there – so what can you do?

Most boarding schools have “taster boarding days or weekends” If in doubt, let your child *road test* the school.

If possible, let your child have a say in the choice of school. If you visit say three schools, he or she will inevitably have a preference. In most cases they will be stamping their feet and proclaiming “I want to go to that one!” – usually the one which stretches your pocket the most with the Olympic sized swimming pool and equestrian centre!

(Tip No 1 – if you really cannot afford it – don’t visit – because junior does not usually appreciate the depth of your wallet!

Tip No 2 – if you are financially stretched, take a look at www.education-fees.co.uk)

See as much of each school as you can, including the actual accommodation. The Head will set the tone, but be sure to meet the particular House Head as well. Above

all, try to visit on a school day such that your child can meet and chat to other boarders. Of course, your child will be anxious and nervous, but meeting new friends who will invariably have great fun and the time of their lives will go a long way to settling their nerves.

3. Academic Track Record

3.1 How do you assess exam performance?

Today we are all getting used to the idea that school examination results, at both GCSE and Advanced Level, get better every year. How difficult it is therefore for parents, viewing the various published league tables each August to decide whether or not a school is good, bad or indifferent. One reason for this is that there is no overall consistency in the way that results are collated and league positions calculated. There is also the usual annual moan about standards and how each record-breaking set of results only proves that it is becoming easier to pass exams and obtain high grades.

There are many factors that parents may take into account when trying to choose what they consider to be the *'best school'* for their children. However, the truth is that there is no school that is best for every child. We can look at exam successes to determine which is the *"best school measured by academic achievements"*, but the real challenge for parents is to choose the *"right school"* which will take into account lots of factors in addition to exam results and we will come back to these later.

However, academic results can be tabulated and that is where most parents start their evaluation. It is not possible to have an endless list of criteria, and perhaps the most common approach is to look at the academic standing of a school and judge whether or not it meets the expectations of parents. Certainly there are other factors that parents might wish to see, such as sports facilities, strong departments in the creative and performing arts and perhaps the provision of special needs teaching. However, for the purpose of the league tables on this website, we have taken strictly academic criteria and applied them to produce lists of best schools in terms of academic success. We feel that this is a good starting point for parents setting out to choose a school for their children, *as long as they are academically gifted*. Remember that not all children will thrive in highly focused academic environment and you could be doing your child a disservice simply by trying to pick a school with the best exam results – we will revert to this point later.

3.2 How the www.best-schools.co.uk League Tables Work

The different variables that make up the current league tables can be confusing and incomprehensible for parents trying to decide on the best school for their child. We exclude schools who have entered less than 20 candidates for A levels and also give extra weighting to schools which achieve good results with a large number of candidates. The league tables can vary dramatically from one year to the next. We give extra weighting to schools which show consistency.

For 2006, we will publish 3 different league tables for boarding schools for boys only, girls only and co-ed. We use A levels only in these tables. If you want to see their GCSE results or UCAS tariffs, you need to search among the other tables for all

senior schools. We only list boarding schools in the boarding tables, which have at least 25% of pupils as boarders.

This website aims to publish all exam results in a factual way, but we also publish **our own www.best-schools.co.uk Top 100**. Education Advisers Limited have taken five criteria and given them a specific weighting with regard to examination results at both GCSE and Advanced Level. We believe that the vast majority of parents send their children to UK independent schools in order to prepare them for entry to a University. Therefore we start with the biggest weighting given to the average number of UCAS points achieved by pupils in a school (excluding General Studies). Then we add the percentage of A and B grade passes as a proportion of the total A-Level entry for a school plus the percentage of A* and A passes at GCSE Level as a proportion of the total number of GCSE's taken by a school. We finish by adding weightings for the entry candidates for A-Levels plus consistency, measured in exam success.

3.3 A-Level and the International Baccalaureate

Debate about the competing merits of A Levels and the International Baccalaureate (IB) has intensified in 2005 as in one league table Westminster School came top with the most number of A Level points per pupil, and Sevenoaks School in Kent came next, although its pupils take the IB examinations as well as A levels. Schools that offer the IB examination, and there are about 30 of these in the independent sector, say that the broad curriculum helps to effectively differentiate between the performance of individual entrants. In 2006 UCAS finally published a UCAS tariff equivalent for IB grades, but this will not take effect till 2008. Some say the IB grades 6 and 7 equate to A level A and Bs, whereas other maintain that it should IB grades 5, 6 and 7 are a fairer comparison. The truth is probably somewhere in between and in event the measures will change as marking parameters change in future years. For the time being we are using 6 and 7.

Be aware that most schools offering the IB ONLY offer the Diploma Programme for the sixth form.

Most universities happily accept IB students from outside of the UK and are equally happy to take UK IB exams. Some have said they believe the IB is a better standard of exam than A levels. However, be aware that some universities specifically require A-Levels in preference to IB for certain degree courses, particularly in the sciences. Parents should ensure that they check carefully with admission requirements for their children's chosen universities, should this be an issue.

3.4 What the League Tables do and do not tell you

Some schools have remarkable exam success rates. However, bear in mind that most of these schools are extremely selective in their entry criteria, whether that is applied at entry ages 11/13 or 16. Indeed it stands to reason that if the 6th form intake will only allow GCSE passes of say at least 6 As and 2 Bs, they are going to get good A level results – but, your child may not gain entry to the school in the first place. Also, if your child is at the bottom end of the academic spectrum, he or she may struggle to keep up the pace with other bright children.

Be aware that some schools do adopt strategies to get themselves higher up the league tables, such as. 1. Only allowing grade As at GCSEs to take A levels, 2 Forcing low grade GCSE performers to pay for their own exam entries for A levels to remove them from the school results. 3. Offering very large scholarships to very bright GCSE candidates from other schools. You can't really fault a school for wanting a good academic record. However, the biggest problem is if YOUR child fails to get the GCSE grades required to progress to the sixth form. Be sure to ask in advance of the school practice and get it in writing. We get numerous requests from parents who find themselves in exactly this situation.

Quite a few independent schools have specialist units for children with special needs such as dyslexia. It could be surmised that the inclusion of such children "dilute" their overall results. Interestingly, this is not usually the case. The mere fact that such schools devote more time to small group tuition usually benefits the rest of the children and everybody's standards rise at the same time.

It could be said that it is easier to achieve higher results with a very small sixth form, which is why we do weight our ratings for larger schools. There is nothing wrong with a small school, but you do need to ensure the school offers a sufficiently wide A level subject choice. Most schools in our tables offer between 20 to 25 A Level subjects. If a school is offering 15 or less, they will likely be the staple courses like mathematics, chemistry etc and you might need to go elsewhere for modern subjects.

School results can vary dramatically from year to year – so, how consistent are their results? Our own top 100 is a composite evaluation and therefore will not change as much as individual tables. If you go to a school website, they will often reveal their results for 5 years or more.

3.5 How about league tables for prep schools?

Most prep schools cover the National Curriculum and some use the methodology of applying tests known as Standard Assessment Tasks or SATS at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 (ages 7 and 11). We do show these results in a separate Best-Prep-Schools league table. However, we must forewarn you that it is not obligatory on prep schools to publish or supply them. Thus the table is not entirely comprehensive. Whereas, when a senior school refuses to supply A level results to us, we often think there is an underlying reluctance to publish disappointing results, this is not necessarily the case for prep schools. If a school is not in our table, "don't write them off" – ask the Head for details of the school's performance.

4. Accommodation Options

4.1 Rooms

At the youngest boarding ages, children will often be accommodated in modest sized rooms or dormitories of 4 to 8 pupils. They are usually encouraged to bring home comforts such as duvets, toys and games.

As they get older, rooms tend to get down to dual or single use – usually very well furnished with private space and storage. Schools are increasingly installing media and internet access so that they can regularly speak to home. In fact some parents say that boarders tell their parents more what is happening at schools than day pupils!

Sixth form colleges are often in university cities and tend to treat the sixth formers to similar style university accommodation – either halls of residence or home stay with local families.

At the end of the day you are going to “pay for what you get”, but if there is a choice, you should at least weigh up the options of degree of comfort/privacy v. price.

5. Ethos of School

5.1 Ethos

Every independent school establishes its own ethos, which can best be evaluated by observing the behaviour of pupils both in and out of class. Are they well behaved in class? Were they working hard? Did they greet you in a polite way? Do they look happy? Are they neat and tidy?

If a school follows a particular religious denomination, that will heavily influence the school ethos. However, the most important factor is the Head, because he or she sets the entire tone for the school. You will only find out by meeting the Head and asking lots of questions, after which you will know if you like the ethos or not!

5.2 School Discipline

Areas such as the school policy on discipline can be an important consideration when you are trying to choose between schools. There can be very big differences between schools with a highly traditional approach and those that put the emphasis on self-development and learning by experience. What you will find is that there is generally a more structured environment in independent schools than in the state sector, but nevertheless quite big differences exist, as for example between schools such as Bedales and Milton Abbey on the one hand, and traditional schools like Wellington and Winchester on the other.

Only you can be the judge of what you prefer for your children. You should have that discussion with the Head of the schools you approach.

6. Pastoral Care and Guardianship

6.1 Pastoral Arrangements

Pastoral care very naturally follows on from school discipline. The school attitude to boarding organisation or day pupils may be rated by some parents as being paramount and parents should also find out how academic work is monitored, whether or not there is a personal tutor for each pupil and how the grading system works. It is helpful to know what support systems are available if your child gets into trouble and who should be contacted if you need help and advice.

Parents also need to know how to get information about their child. Are there regular meetings with pastoral and teaching staff? Are there school functions that parents can attend during the term? Is there an association for parents to join, or a regular newsletter or magazine that tells them what is happening in the school? Parents should enquire about the arrangements for health care such as, how many trained nursing staff are available and how often is there a doctor's surgery?

Lastly, parents need to be assured that if their child is boarding they need to be safe and secure and that the school managers and staff take all reasonable care to see that this is attended to.

6.2 Guardianship

If a parent is outside of the UK, whether they are UK or Foreign Nationals, arrangements must be made for each full boarding child to have a guardian, who can take responsibility for the child, particularly outside of school hours at half term and school exeat. For UK nationals, there is often a relative to undertake the role. For others, the services of a Guardian must be secured. Some schools are prepared to undertake the role themselves. Others will have teamed up with a guardianship services company. Such services are not cheap – so remember to factor in the costs. Also it is vital to ensure that guardianship provider organisations are reputable – such as members of AEGIS (www.aegisuk.net)

7. School Facilities

7.1 School Facilities

Today most schools in the independent sector spend a great deal of their budgets on the fabric of their buildings and in providing outstanding facilities for their pupils. Parents should ask to see the school library and enquire about the sports area and whether or not the school has a sports hall. Most schools today have well-equipped IT centres but parents should also ask about the provision of computers in boarding houses, as well as in teaching departments. If your child is interested in the creative arts you should ask to see the Art School and find out whether computers are used in graphic design and what different types of materials can pupils use in their studies.

Many schools offer enrichment programmes, which is sometimes called General Studies. This can be a mixture of examined and non-examined study, but its common feature is that it offers a range of life skill subjects, such as motorbike maintenance, debating, yoga, musical appreciation and the like. Some schools will have an extensive programme for Duke of Edinburgh awards while others will have a Combined Cadet Force. These can be very important to a pupil when applying for university as it

enables them to say quite a lot about themselves on the UCAS form outside the confines of A-Level subjects.

7.2 Special facility schools

There are 5 specialist music schools – Chetham’s, Yehudi Menuhin School, Purcell School, Wells Cathedral School and St Mary’s School, Edinburgh.

Many schools offer the Performing Arts but the 3 which specialise in ballet are the Royal Ballet School, Elmhurst School for Performing Arts and the Arts Educational School in Tring.

Many boarding schools will cater for children with special needs (such as dyslexia). However, there is a difference between those which accept wholly special needs pupils and those who accept a minority of say 10% of total pupils.

8. Extra Curricular Activities

8.1 Variety of activities

Many independent schools offer a huge range of activities – from sports to arts to music to outward bound courses. Millfield, a very large school, is famed for offering a choice of 80 right down to Zulu bead working – although we don’t know how many Zulu bead specialists they turn out!

The point is that that opportunities are invariably extensive – as long as you realise you are going to pay an extra fee for most of them – if not for the teacher, then for the equipment.

Sports and music are always well catered for – in contrast to the diminishing availability in state schools.

A school will always provide you with a list of their activities and for those with a rather anxious child, it is a way of motivating them to overcome their reservations.

9. Location

9.1 Where to choose?

With 2,300+ independent schools of which about 700 are boarding schools, there are choices in every county. There tend to be more schools in the South, simply because international pupils are important to many schools and thus a location within 50 miles of Heathrow or Gatwick Airports may be preferable. With air, road and train travel being so efficient in the UK, it really does not matter where a boarding school is situated, unless of course you are a UK resident using flexi boarding. Such parents

can find a suitable school within easy travelling distance of home and many private schools offer a minibuss service

Many International parents will begin their search in London (as the place they know best) but you should be aware that there are very few boarding schools in London itself. However there are many in the Home Counties within a 50 mile radius of London. If in doubt, fill in the consultancy enquiry form on www.best-schools.co.uk

If you are seeking a private sixth form college (see www.sixth-form.com) these are mostly centred on London, Cambridge and Oxford. Most will have boarding accommodation, but it is mainly either university style halls of residence or home stay with local families.

10. Value for Money

UK Boarding Schools at senior level can cost anywhere from £15,000 to £27,000 per annum at the senior level life stages. Those near to London or well known public schools are mostly in excess of £20,000 per annum.

We have included school fees in the league table, but only for the top ranked schools.

Parents should also take into account the other costs, or 'extras', that can add a substantial amount to your bill.

School uniform and kit for school games is probably the first of these extras that you will encounter, and this is usually an unavoidable cost. However, you should ask how inclusive the fees are and what extra costs are likely to be incurred. For example music lessons and school trips are not usually included in the fees, neither are school textbooks and essential stationery. There will also be some subjects, such as Home Economics, and A-Level Theatre Studies that can add sizeable amounts to your bill because of the nature of these courses.

It has been estimated that extras can add between 5% and 15% to the school fees you are paying, so it is always wise to ask for a complete breakdown of fees and extras when considering a particular school.

If you are a non UK resident, you also have travel costs home during the holidays or extra accommodation and guardianship fees.

Whilst you can be surprised by the size of boarding fees, do not forget to take into account the other costs you are saving – the daily home taxi service ferrying children to and from school, meals at home, heating, light or telephone bills!

It is wise to check out costs **before** you visit any school.

Most schools offer a limited number of bursaries and scholarships. However, beware that most schools are oversubscribed with applications for admission and always receive more requests for such discounts than they have places available.

For UK residents who are higher rate taxpayers, please check out www.education-fees.co.uk for ways to reduce your cost.

Most interested parents are committed to an independent education as long as it fits their budget. However, we all want to feel we are getting value for money. Part of this evaluation is to compare what one school provides against another in relation to cost.

Some extra issues for International Parents

1 English Language

UK boarding schools will expect you child to speak English reasonably fluently on arrival. However a number of schools will be able to provide additional English Language tuition so that they can cope with the school curriculum.

If your child speaks little or no English, it will be better for them to start in an International Study Centre to prepare them for entry into a mainstream boarding school.

2. International Admissions

As you will already have read, most UK children gain entry to senior independent boarding schools by passing The Common Entrance Exam, which typically only take place in January or February.

International students will often be considered for admission on the basis of existing school reports, a reference from their previous Head plus an Interview. Sometimes a school might wish the child to sit a test on the visit to the school. Some schools might be prepared to allow that test to be taken on the previous school's premises.

UK schools will want to ensure that the pupil fits in with the academic standard of the pupils they will be joining.

So, how do you decide? What next?

After researching the school profiles, forming a short list and requesting brochures, get yourself a questionnaire to evaluate your shortlist during school visits. We give you our own free questionnaire in the appendix to this eGuide.

If you are a UK resident, never forget to ask the Head of your child's existing school. He or she will likely know the local schools which will suit both your child's academic progress and temperament.

There is absolutely no substitute for a personal visit – did you like the school, the premises, the facilities, the atmosphere, the headmaster, the teachers and the manner

of the pupils? You will be invited to attend on an Open Day, but is it possible to visit on a normal school day, when you can experience the daily routine?

Lastly, after doing all of your research, go back to basics. The real starting point for choosing a school has to begin with you and your hopes and aspirations for your children. You know them better than anyone else and can best judge their strengths and weaknesses. You are in the best position to know what type of school will work best for them. Although your schooldays were some time ago, the essentials in the 21st Century remain the same as when you were at school. Literacy and numeracy plus knowing the difference between right and wrong count for as much in the modern world as they did when you were a schoolchild. You need to match the qualities you consider right for education with those offered by the *right school*.

It's a huge decision. If you need help, then avail yourself of our bespoke consultancy service <http://www.best-schools.co.uk/expert-assistance.aspx>

APPENDIX



The Education Advisers 30 Point Check List

**Questions and Points to consider
for Parents
in choosing an Independent Boarding School**

**A Check-List of Recommended Questions from the Parent's Perspective
Note – this is an *aide-memoire* to help you to remember what to ask.**

1. Is this school ideally suited to the academic aspirations, which you have for your child?
 - Common Entrance Exam to gain access to Senior School?
 - GCSEs?
 - GCE A Level and Advanced Subsidiary?
 - GNVQs and Vocational A levels?
 - International Baccalaureate?
 - An all round quality education?
2. What are the entrance criteria? Will your child have to sit tests or the Common Entrance Exam? What are the pass marks?
3. Would your child be better suited to an academic environment (with emphasis on traditional subject tuition in a disciplined environment) or a less academic approach (with opportunity to excel in skilled crafts, sports or the performing arts)?
4. What is the School Curriculum? Is it the National Curriculum or wider – if so, how? Does it offer your child a sufficiently wide and balanced choice? If you are contemplating switching your child back to the State sector later, what are the implications?
5. Make sure you visit the dormitories or boarding bedrooms and the common areas? Are the facilities modern and comfortable or spartan like an outward bound course? Can the children personalise their space with their own mementos?
6. Make sure you meet the Housemaster/mistress. How do they get on with the pupils? What arrangements are made for boarders at weekends? What are the activities? Are children allowed into the local town-accompanied or unaccompanied?
7. Would you consider weekday boarding and weekends at home? Does the school offer taster day boarding for your child to find out?
8. Do you need guardianship – will the school provide/arrange for this?
9. What are meals like? Do they adopt a well balanced and healthy diet?
10. Do you and your child want single sex or co educational schooling? If co-ed, what is the male:female ratio? Is the smaller gender group well integrated into the activities of the whole school?
11. What are the costs (compare them with your short list)?

- Per term
 - Boarding
 - Meals
 - Extra curricular subject charges
 - Uniform – what is compulsory?
 - Kit
 - Musical instruments
 - Books
 - Other typical extras
12. Are there bursaries or scholarships which might be applicable to you? What are the criteria? Is there published information?
 13. What are the qualifications and experience of teachers? What is the turnover of teaching staff?
 14. What are the examination successes track record?
 15. Will your child have to sit an entrance examination? Is there a waiting list? Is it first come – first served?
 16. If you are considering a prep school from which your child will switch to senior elsewhere, what is the success record on Common Entrance exams. What proportion of children get their first choice senior school?
 17. Did you like the Head? Did you feel you received straight answers to your questions? What are his/her principles, policies and obsessions? How do the pupils react to the Head – respect? warmth? fear? Did the Head take an interest in YOUR child?
 18. Did you like the other staff you met?
 19. What is the school attitude to parental contact, especially in Boarding School? How often are parent's meetings? Is there a Parents' Association? Is there a regular newsletter? How are the parents advised or consulted with on disciplinary matters?
 20. What is the typical class size for the various age ranges? Ask to see some of the children's current workbooks.
 21. How much has the school invested in technology? What are its ICT facilities? Does it teach pupils how to use up to date software? Do pupils get their own email addresses? What does its own website look like? Does it communicate with parents by email?
 22. What quality of facilities does the school have?
 - Main buildings

- Classrooms
- Hall
- Accommodation
- Sports
- Arts
- Drama
- Computing
- Media

23. What is the school approach to discipline? Is it published? Will it suit your child's temperament? Does it match your own views?
24. Are there sets of published Rules – e.g discipline, bullying, drug abuse, dress code?
25. Is religious affiliation important? Are aspects of religion compulsory?
26. What proportion of 6th formers go to university? What are their destinations? Does the school have dedicated higher education and careers advisers?
27. Ask to see the Regulator's school inspection reports
28. Ask to see the latest annual financial report (is it adequately funded to attract quality teachers and expand facilities if necessary?)
29. What was your gut feeling on a personal visit on a normal school day?
- The staff
 - The premises
 - The facilities
 - The atmosphere
 - The pupils
30. What did you think of the children? Were they happy? Were they well mannered? Did they rush about ? Were they neatly dressed in school uniform? Were they polite to teachers and visitors alike?