



## IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT SCHOOL (1)

Generally children are expected to attend the schools in their own locality (catchment area). However this is not always what their parents want as rightly or wrongly they could have a negative opinion of the local school. Oftentimes this is because they tend to see the pupils on their way to and from school whilst they are being 'typical teenagers'. Some parents are therefore inclined to look elsewhere hoping to find that 'perfect' school that meets their own criteria but do not know how to go about it.

There are several factors that influence choice of a school and finding that 'perfect' school is near impossible as no school is perfect. What each parent should look for is the best fit for their own child, every child is different and so is the school that is most suitable for each one of them

Factors that influence the choice often include safety, proximity to the home, discipline, faith, academic results, the range of extra-curricular activities on offer, grounds, sports facilities and demographic mix amongst others. A starting point for the search is often the school league tables. Despite the amount of criticism levied against the tables by the media in recent years they are still very useful when you start your search for a school. Although the league tables are not the be all and end all, statistically schools that score highly in the league tables also tend to satisfy a lot of the other criteria that parents seek especially in

the area of discipline and extra-curricular activities. Some of the following factors will also help parents in their final selection:

- Do not rely only on one year's league table results check back for at least 5 years to confirm trends and consistency in academic standards. A school that was known to be very good in the past may be heading downwards whereas a previously failing school could be on its way up.

**...every child is different and so is the school that is most suitable...**

- Find out what happens to most of the pupils after their stint in the school. Do most of them progress to further education and if so which universities do they end up going to.
- Most schools have open evenings at least once a year so visit the school to get that 'gut feeling' about suitability for your own child; this is something you cannot get from their website or the glossy brochures. If you are good at forward planning you could visit more than once to capture anything you missed the first time. Some parents visit

prospective secondary schools when their child is in year 5 then again in year 6 to be more sure and to ask more questions having seen other schools.

- By all means check out the school grounds, sports facilities and available equipment but remember the hood does not make the monk. Whilst brand new facilities are good they do not necessarily reflect the levels of discipline, academic standards and the culture of a school.

- There is an old-fashioned notion that faith schools are usually good schools and single-sex schools are better than mixed ones; these are quite often the case but there are exceptions to every rule hence no assumptions should be made, it is usually unwise to select a school based on a single factor without further investigation.

- School that have 'labels/badges' such as beacon school, leading edge, specialist science college, sportsmark, language college etc. have been recognised for excelling in certain areas and often have additional funding for their specialisation. If your child has particular strengths these types of schools may be more beneficial. Hence assuming most of your other criteria are met by a **language college** your child may be better off attending that school instead of any other school of a similar ranking if he/she has an **aptitude for languages**.

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- Word-of-mouth is very useful particularly from parents of existing pupils however this should always be taken with a pinch of salt as expectations and standards are not always the same. More caution should be exercised when listening to someone whose child does not attend the school. Referrals are however still a good indicator especially if more than one existing parent is saying the same thing about a particular school.
  - Whilst new schools can be a good idea i.e. with lots of modern facilities and equipment plus the opportunity to go in any direction, one disadvantage is that there is no track record or history therefore it is difficult to compare them with other schools.
  - Another indicator of a school's rating is the level of subscription. In any particular year there could be more or less applicants than places in the school. A school that has a consistently low number of applications may do so because of its location (sometimes this happens in the rural areas). However if this happens in an averagely populated area or where there is another school not too far away that is either fully or over subscribed then it is probably not a good sign. Information about levels of subscription of any state school can be obtained from the LEA.
- To be continued in the next issue...*

## ARE GREAT READERS BORN OR MADE?

**But, take heart. The benefits of reading to your children will be evident for years to come and the daily task of reading to your child will seem like a small price to pay.**

Research has proven time after time that it is beneficial to read to our children and that bedtime stories are a valuable part of a child's bedtime routines. But let's face it; it's not the easiest thing to do. When you've had a hard day at work, had to rush to pick the kids up, figured out what to make for dinner and then cooked it, the last thing you want to do is have to read a story you have no interest in, be it to your own children or anyone else's.

But, take heart. The benefits of reading to your children will be evident for years to come and the daily task of reading to your child will seem like a small price to pay.

Getting children to read well is a task that starts long before they reach school, you need to introduce your children to the beauty of the written word long before they have to start formal reading.

Reading involves many different skills, which do not always develop at the same rate, so children do need to consolidate their progress, e.g. a child with a strong visual memory may be able to read the words but not understand their meaning.

The reason for reading is to get something out of it, not merely to practice reading: children should be reading for pleasure, interest and information.

Experience shows that children who are pushed too fast

into difficult reading material become competent at decoding the text, but do not expect to understand what they read: this causes problems as they get older as they find learning from reading difficult.

### Tricks of the Trade

#### Make sure your children see you reading

Children often copy what their parents do. Let your children see you reading for leisure or reading to gather information. Your favourite novel does not have to be *War and Peace* or *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*; you can read newspapers, hobby magazines, glossy magazines, and comics. It's not what you read, it's the fact that you are reading. The choice of reading material is yours to make but be aware your children will be influenced by the literature you bring into your home. You can imagine my mother's surprise when, out of the blue, my 8 year old brother asked her where the latest edition of her *Bella* and *Woman's Own* magazines were.

#### Quiet Time

Quality reading should be done when the TV or radio is off so there are no distractions. I suppose this is why many parents choose bedtime as story time, but any time of the day that is suitable for you and the child is the perfect time.

#### The library

Your child needs to know their way around your local library. You need to let your child join the library and have his/her own library card.

#### Reading material is everywhere

Talk to your child as you play, shop or work around the house. Listen to what they say. Ask questions. Point out letters and words that they see all around them – read street signs, cereal boxes or signs on shop fronts and on cars.

#### Remember...

If you don't remember anything else from this article, remember this...

**MAKE READING FUN!!!**

- by Yemisi Gibbons

**In the next Issue: More tips on sharing books with your baby and toddler**

**We are what we repeatedly do.**

**Excellence, then is not an act but a habit.**

**ARISTOTLE**



## YOUR CHILD NEEDS SPACE TO STUDY

As your child gets older i.e. from about their last year in primary school they will need to work independently and in a quiet environment to achieve the best results. Leaving them alone to work independently encourages creativity and the ability to use their own initiative. This does not mean you do not work with them; it's just another way of developing their skills set. Below are a few tips to help your child achieve this:

- Where possible provide a study table and bookshelf in your child's bedroom
- If you can afford to do so, convert one of the rooms in your home to a study area
- Keep the study time regular but brief; for a child in year six this should ideally be about one hour a day
- Studying should be away from the television, telephone, computer games and younger siblings' noise
- Do not keep interrupting your child's study time by sending him/her on errands
- The **use of the internet** is an exception to the rule this should be in an **open area** rather than in your child's bedroom for the few reasons stated below:
  1. It is difficult to monitor what your child is doing on the web otherwise
  2. Your child may be playing games or chatting with mates under the guise of 'doing research'
  3. The internet is not always a safe place to leave your child unattended

**Leaving them alone to work independently encourages creativity and the ability to use their own initiative.**



## READERS' CORNER

A big thank you goes to all those who sent words of encouragement and support and forwarded the newsletter on to others. This has helped increase our distribution list as some of your friends have asked to be included in our mailing list

Keep providing us with feedback as that will definitely help us provide an improved newsletter to you .

Do let us know whether or not you want your comments to be published in future issues of the newsletter.

If you want to make a comment about this edition or if there is a topic you'd want to see included in future issues of the

newsletter kindly send an email to us at [smart.kid@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:smart.kid@hotmail.co.uk).

Find below some of the feedback we have received from readers like you.

*I pray that it marks the beginning of good kids ... and the empowerment of black kids who have so much to offer the society*

- Dayo A

*I think you are on a winner with this project, very interesting and very informative*

- Lucy T

*I think the newsletter is very informative and well laid out*

- Name Supplied

*What can I say except EXCELLENT!!! The whole concept and idea is one of my great passions. We need as black people to stand up and be counted; the government has failed us for too long, we need to do it ourselves*

- Yemisi G

*Well done, you've worked very hard at this, you must have been very busy may God continue to bless you as you use your knowledge to bless others*

- Joyin O

*I believe this is an awesome project. Keep up the good work. I pray that God grows it & strengthens you to remain with the vision for it that he has placed in your heart.*

- Ade A

**To contribute an article to the next issue of The Smart Kid, send your email to [info@thesmartkid.org](mailto:info@thesmartkid.org)**

## CODE CRACKER

### Independent School

An Independent school in the United Kingdom is a school that relies for all or most of its funding on non-governmental sources. The school has full control over admissions and, within the constraints of law, its curriculum. There are more than 2,500 independent schools in the UK, educating about 620,000 children.

### City Academy

A city academy is a new type of British school invented in the late 1990s. Academies are all ability schools established by sponsors working in partnership with central Government and local education partners. Sponsors and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provide the capital costs for the Academy. Running costs are met in full by the DfES. In return for £2m of investment, a private sponsor is given control of a school, which may be an existing school, or a newly-built one. Academies are non fee-paying and most are located in areas of disadvantage. They must have regard to the same code of practice for admission as maintained schools so cannot select beyond the 10% aptitude rule. There are about 46 city academies already open, with another 63 being developed and ministers committed to opening 200 by 2010.

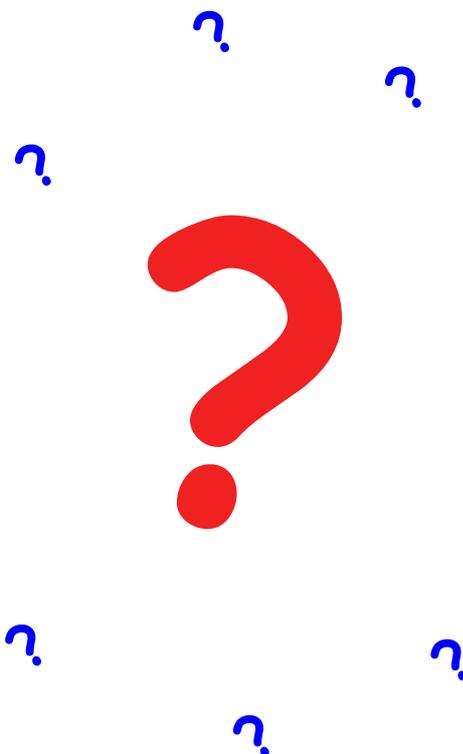
### Public School

The term public school has different (and in some cases contradictory) meanings due to regional differences. In England and Wales, as well as in Northern Ireland, "public school" refers only to certain independent secondary schools that are members of the Headmasters Conference. The term Public school was traditionally used in England and Wales for the elite of independent boys' schools. More recently this now includes independent co-educational or girls' schools, that provide 13 to 18 education. Usage differs in other parts of the British Isles: in Scotland and Northern Ireland independent schools are also called private schools and the phrase "public school" has long been an alternative name for council schools in the state sector.

### Voluntary Aided School

Voluntary Aided schools are typically owned by Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish bodies. They are funded partly by the local education authority, partly by the governing body and partly by the voluntary organisation. The land and buildings are owned by a voluntary body, usually a religious organisation. Education in voluntary aided schools is provided free just as in all other state schools. Each of these schools teach the National Curriculum and have the facilities

necessary to support this and all other curriculum activities. All of the teaching and non-teaching staff at the school are employed by the governors; the governing body is responsible for all the school's budget and finances. The admissions policy is determined and administered by the governors in consultation with the local education authority.



**The Smart Kid is an organisation formed to empower 21<sup>st</sup> century parents in the UK by sharing vital information and motivating them to take positive action for their children. We expect that the parents who contact us will go on to share the information with their peers, friends and family thus empowering one another. These gradual but consistent efforts will produce a shift in the culture and value system in the UK. Our vision is that previously untapped ability, lying dormant in a sizeable proportion of the population, will be discovered thus creating a more productive society where the best opportunities are no longer restricted to the realm of a select few. Thanks for taking the time to read this and we hope you share our dream for all children in the UK.**



To receive future copies of this free newsletter send an email to [info@thesmartkid.org](mailto:info@thesmartkid.org)