

Choosing the right school

Bringing up and educating a child is usually a partnership between parents and teachers. Ideally parents should have a range of options when choosing a school – the UN Declaration of Human Rights permits parents the ‘right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children’. The Human Rights Act 1998 goes further in agreeing that ‘...the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions’. The practicality of such provision is less straightforward and parental choices sometimes have to involve compromise.

Considering the choice

Your first choice will be whether to stay at home with your child or whether to return to work and if so, when and for how many hours per week. It’s important to decide what is best for your child and your family. When thinking about pre-school nursery education, decide whether, at what point, and for how long each day, you want to entrust your child to care outside of your home.

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you should make it
based on your
knowledge of your child’*

As your child approaches school age, you will need to make another decision. Formal education in the UK starts earlier than in any other country worldwide and children are also among the most tested. If you are a stay-at-home parent, you may not want

to send your child to school at the age of 4 or even 7, particularly if he or she is summer-born: that choice is yours and you should make it based on your knowledge of your child, your views as a parent and the needs of your family. You might decide to home school instead.

Making a choice

UK education provision, particularly in England, is diverse but there is information to help you when choosing a school. A range of data is collected and used to construct league tables; all schools are also categorised by inspection. Much of this information should be accessible via links on each school’s website.

Before choosing a school, look at the options available to you. If you want a particular type of school, for example a church school, check that you meet its admissions criteria – you should find these on the school’s website. Before applying, you should visit a school to

evaluate the ethos. How does the school community evidence its beliefs and virtues? Are peer, adult-to-student and home-school relationships positive and respectful? Is the physical environment attractive and well cared for? How do other parents feel about the quality of their partnership with the school? How does the school provide for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural growth?

'your parental responsibilities are not just practical and physical but also spiritual'

As a Christian, you are acknowledging when choosing a school that your parental responsibilities are not just practical and physical but also spiritual. Do you want the virtues that you nurture in your child to be underpinned by a faith ethos school, or do you want your child to evaluate faith principles in a secular setting? Christian virtues are, after all, the shared virtues of any cohesive community. Whatever decision you make, it's important to remember that faith is a personal choice and school may influence, but it will not determine, your child's spiritual life.

Supporting your choice

Wherever your child goes to school, even if it isn't your preferred choice, demonstrate confidence in the school. Keep lines of communication with your child open and learn to listen between those lines, offering encouragement and showing interest in his or her learning, friends and activities. If you value learning, your child will, too. If you value people, your child will, too. Relationship is crucial in an effective home-school partnership because you will be the mediator for many years between these two key areas of your child's life.

For more information:

- Should Christians abandon public [state] schools?
<http://www.plough.com/en/articles/2015/january/should-christians-abandon-public-schools>
- Comparison of different types of school: A guide to schools in England
<http://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/sites/default/files/Comparison%20of%20school%20types.pdf>