



THE FAMILY MOVE ABROAD GUIDE TO

Your Child's Expatriate Education

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
WHEN SELECTING A SCHOOL
IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Few things will likely have a greater impact on your child's acceptance of their new expat life than their school setting. Remember, your child's school is more than just a place to get an education. It's their primary gateway to new friends and activities, particularly if you're arriving as strangers.

You can't control what happens at school with respect to how their peers receive them. You can't control how your child will respond to the inherent stress of a new school environment. But you can try to find a setting that optimizes their chances for success, academically, socially and psychologically.

The Basics - Educational Offering, Structure and Setting

- School day schedule - Hours, Lunch Breaks, Recess Time
- Lunch Options - Dining hall, bring lunch from home, leave campus, etc.
- Annual Schedule - School Calendar, Grading Periods
- Curriculum - Specific curriculum for each grade level and content area. Specific constructs and metrics measured.
- Grades - Grading scales and systems, consequences of a failing grade (repeat grade, summer school, repeat that class, etc.)
- Accreditation and the specific diploma options offered
- Additional languages offered as either required or elective classes
- Other elective options or additional academic criteria
- Extracurricular programs
- Financial Aid/Tuition Assistance
- Special Education Services - Individualized Education Plans or other accommodations the school can provide and documentation required to receive these services

Demographics and Integration Support

What is the percentage of children from local families versus a (potentially transient) international community?

Each offers its pluses and minuses with respect to educational goals, acquiring the local language, as well as your child's integration, especially if your child doesn't speak the local language.

What is the average years in attendance at the school? For example, local children might start in preschool and stay up until graduation, whereas expat children might come and go, perhaps enrolled for no more than a year or two.

Be direct when interview a potential school. Specifically ask the following:

- Generally speaking, do foreign kids tend to be welcomed or rejected?
- What is the school's policy on bullying?
- Does the school offer incoming students or the family any support to help integrate, such as a 'buddy child' or 'buddy family.'

Foreign Language Management

What is the primary language used to teach?

A school that teaches completely in the local language, as will be the case in any public or state run school, will likely provide the fastest path to language acquisition. It may also mean few if any friends until your child picks up the lingo.

If the language used for instruction is not your child's native language, what systems does the school implement to support language acquisition?

These might include visual supports during tests for younger children. Older children might be permitted to take tests in English for a specified amount of time even if a particular class is taught in the local language.

If the language of instruction is English in an otherwise non English speaking country, likely so at an international school, is there an English language arts program for native English speakers?

If not, your child's English classes might be English as a second language. A freebie for your kid in terms of ease, but a loss in terms of continued vocabulary, writing and reading development. Not a deal breaker, just something to be aware of.

If a bilingual school, which classes are taught in each language? Does that distribution change by grade level?

Are any other languages offered as either required or elective classes? Will the school release your child from this requirement if deemed better for their overall academic progress?

Electives and Post Graduation Guidance

What other elective options are offered? In multi lingual school environments, some of these electives might only be available to children studying specific foreign languages. For example, to take french cooking classes, the child needs to be studying French.

What other academic requirements are imposed by the school?

What other academic preferences do you have that you want to ask the school about?

Finally, what does the school offer to prepare for life after graduation? This would include guidance counseling, determining prospective universities, college application assistance, and entrance exam prep. Bear in mind, just because the school is offering an international diploma doesn't mean they have the knowledge to help your child apply to an American or other foreign university, if that's their goal.

Extracurricular Activities and Campus Life

Does the school have its own sports teams? Are they recreational, or by selection or both? What about other clubs, hobbies or enrichment activities?

Does the school have a school community that might include family events such as picnics, sports nights, game nights, etc.? Not the norm outside the US, but some international schools do make a point to create an extended social environment for their families. If you're relocating to a place where you know no one, this could be a really supportive means to help you all integrate into your new home setting.

Remember, your goal isn't to engineer your child's school environment, but rather to create one that nurtures their needs on all their levels of well being, and supports your time living in a foreign country.

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