

The Middle School Visit: A Step-by-Step Guide

A school visit is an invaluable way to learn about whether a particular school is the right place for your child. Even after a short visit, you'll have a much better sense of the school's strengths, challenges and approaches toward teaching and learning.

How to Plan an Effective Visit:

1. Do your homework.

Read about the schools you'll be visiting.

Examine their school profiles on GreatSchools.net and note any questions you have about student performance, resources or teacher background.

Talk to other parents.

Search for stories about the school in the online edition of the local newspaper.

2. Schedule your visit. Call the school and ask to speak with the school secretary. Explain that you're considering enrolling your child and would like to make an appointment to visit. Find out if you'll be able to meet the principal and a few teachers while you're there.

3. Ask and observe. When you visit a school, be sure to ask questions and observe the environment.

School name:

Principal:

Preparing for Your School Visit: A Checklist

- I researched and read about this school using GreatSchools.net school profiles.

NOTE: Write any questions you have about student performance, resources or teacher background here:

- I talked to other parents or went to the online edition of the local newspaper and searched for stories about this school.

NOTE: Write anything you found interesting and would like to find out more about here:

- I scheduled a visit.

Day: _____

Time: _____

Names and titles of people I will meet:

During the School Visit: Key Questions to Ask

Here are some helpful questions to ask during a school visit.

Mission and community:

- Does this school have a particular philosophy or mission?
- What is this school's approach to student discipline and safety?
- How does this school monitor students' progress toward achieving standards?
- What professional development opportunities do teachers have? How do teachers collaborate?
- What are some of this school's greatest accomplishments? What are some of the biggest challenges it faces?
- Is there an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA)? What sorts of parent involvement take place at this school?
- How does this school communicate with parents? How can parents contact teachers?

Resources and extracurricular opportunities:

- What kinds of library resources are available to students?
- How is technology used to support teaching and learning at this school?
- Where do the arts fit into this school's curriculum? Is there a school choir, band or orchestra? Drama program? Art classes?
- What extracurricular opportunities (e.g., sports, clubs, community service, competitions) are available for students? How do students try out, sign up or get selected for these activities?
- How does this school support students who have academic, social or emotional difficulties?
- What strategies are used to teach students who are not fluent in English?
- How do students get to school? Is free school busing available?

Especially for middle schools:

- Are classes "tracked" according to levels (e.g., remedial, advanced)? If so, what criteria are used to determine student placement in classes? Will any credits count in high school?
- Are core classes integrated (e.g., math, science) or are they separate? Why? What are the benefits for students of the structure the school is using?
- Are counselors available to guide and prepare students for major academic decisions that will define their options in high school and beyond?
- How often are students graded? How are parents informed about student progress?
- Are foreign language classes (French, Spanish, etc.) offered to students?
- What programs exist to help students with their social and emotional development?
- If the school is large, does it make an effort to create a sense of community?

Brainstorm about other questions before your school visit and write them here:

Use this space to note particularly interesting responses:

During the School Visit: Be an Active Observer

Use this checklist during your school visit:

- Classrooms look cheerful.
- Student work is displayed, and it seems appropriate for the grade level.
- Students move through the hall in an orderly and safe manner.
- Teachers seem enthusiastic and knowledgeable. (Notice whether they are asking questions that stimulate students and keep them engaged.)
- The principal seems confident and interested in interacting with students, teachers and parents.
- Students act respectfully toward each other in class, during transitions and at lunchtime.
- Facilities are well maintained, the bathrooms are clean and well supplied, and the grounds look safe and inviting.

Note your other observations here:

Reflections About This School

The things I like best about this school are:

Reservations I have about this school are:

On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 representing the lowest score and 10 the highest), circle how you rate this school:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10