



Year 8 pupils



Hazelwood School



Hazelwood Upper School Learning Centre

HOW TO CHOOSE A SENIOR SCHOOL



Will Fagg, Head of Senior School Transfer, Hazelwood School

Supporting you in choosing the right senior school for your child is one of the most exciting aspects of my job. We can help you with this decision because during their time with us at Hazelwood we have come to know the children, their strengths, passions, interests and learning preferences. This insight together with our familiarity and strong relationships with the senior schools, enables us to empower families to make the best decision for their child from the range of schools available – boarding, day, Co-Ed, single sex and schools of different sizes or focuses. There are many schools where your child will perform strongly academically but it is far more important to find somewhere where they will thrive across several areas. It is essential to choose a school where your child will be happy and will be well looked after pastorally; this will foster a love of learning, which in turn will help them achieve and excel across all areas of school life and prepare them more successfully for university and ultimately the workplace. My advice to parents, who are looking for schools, is as follows:

- First and foremost, allow your child to enjoy prep school, and teach them the skill of living in the “now” especially in today’s ever evolving world of technology. Yes, as school and parents we need to investigate and discuss senior school routes and options for the children, but never lose sight of the irreplaceable growth opportunities that the prep school experience offers. Too much emphasis on the next step, not only robs them of the opportunity to enjoy their time at prep school, but places enormous pressure on them at a time when this is not necessary.
- Talk to the Head or Deputy Head of your child’s current school. Not only will they have up to date knowledge of the entry requirements for each school, but a unique insight into the pedagogical requirements. The school sees your child in a learning environment; a very different environment from home.
- Visit schools on normal school days and observe the mood and application of the students. Ideally talk to the Head of the school and do not be afraid to ask for a second visit if you have further queries or concerns. Look at the students, their interactions and demeanour as they will form your child’s peer group.
- Attend as many Open Days as you can. Visiting other schools gives you a great flavour of what they stand for and while every school will put on a good show, it will be clear which schools foster that love of learning.
- Read inspection reports and seek advice from your current school if you have any concerns on your findings.
- Consider the academic results of the school, but perhaps more importantly the “value added” scores, if they are available.
- If considering a boarding environment, read school policies on discipline and behaviour; these vary enormously from school to school and it is therefore important that you share similar outlooks. For boarders, this will be their home away from home.
- Do not be afraid to seek opinions from friends, who have children at the prospective school, but equally be mindful that this is a personal decision and therefore do not be swayed too much by the views of others. It can be difficult to distinguish an opinion from a prejudice. What is right (or wrong) for their child may be the opposite for yours.
- Listen to your child’s view but remember that ultimately this is your decision. Children will often be swayed by factors such as friendship groups; these change and your child will make friends anywhere.
- Discuss the extra-curricular provision at the school, with your child’s strengths and likes in mind.
- Find out about the pastoral care; some schools focus on this more than others and each institution will have different strategies and structures in place for different year groups/houses/social groups.
- Follow your gut feeling. I have visited many schools as part of this role and some of the schools just “feel right”, without seemingly having anything that you can put your finger on that separates it from a competitor.

Although the prospect may not be at the forefront of your minds currently, do not rule out boarding schools. The benefits of a modern boarding education are manifest and arguments for weekly and flexi boarding, in particular, are compelling. We sent a number of children to boarding environments from our 2024 cohort and all seem to be thriving. They have the time to enjoy all that secondary schools have to offer, while having more than enough chance to complete their school work. Prep time does not descend into a crisis or a row because the children all have to do it at certain times and the possibilities to do art/music/sports clubs in the evenings are enjoyed by all. Most schools encourage the children to go home at weekends and many parents report that the quality of family time has been enhanced due to their children being away during the week, focusing on their school work. Boarding schools also teach life skills at 13 that your child may not necessarily acquire otherwise until they leave home! Boarding does not suit everyone, but it can be a good option to consider. Above all, remember that you are interviewing the school; it is up to them to convince you that their school is right for you and your child.