

When you're looking for the best overall fit

Tips for your school visit

- **Check out its resources:** Make sure the school has the resources and facilities your child needs to thrive. For instance, your child may require a computer lab, an arts studio, an expansive library, a physics club, or an after school robotics class. And, all students can benefit from robust counselling departments, learning resource centres, and onsite support staff like academic advisors, guidance counsellors, tutors, and social workers.
- **Observe a class in action:** Ask if you can observe a class. If your child is old enough, ask if they can sit in on a class or even have a shadow day (where they experience a full day at the school)? Here are some things to look for: How do teachers interact with students? How do they stimulate, engage, and challenge them? Do they differentiate instruction, tailoring it to each student's unique learning needs? Do they provide much one-on-one support? Do they offer subject-specific enrichment or acceleration? Do they offer any other customized in-class adaptations or accommodations? Is there a lively and dynamic "vibe" in class?
- **Observe the school environment up close:** Where do people gather? Are teachers interacting with students outside the classroom? Is there happy banter in the hallways or do students walk with their eyes down, focused only on their destination? How do students interact with each other? Are there lots of hugs and high-fives? Are students respectful of each other? Is there any graffiti in the washroom, and if so, what does it say?
- **Look at what's on the walls:** Are there posters for academic clubs or study groups in the hallways? Is plenty of student work posted in classrooms? What does this work look like? Is it indicative of high academic standards and creativity? You can also ask teachers and school reps to look at student work.
- **Talk to students:** Ask them what classes are like and if they find them stimulating and challenging. What do they like and not like about their teachers? Also, try to learn about the academic culture at the school: For instance, are most students more competitive or collaborative? Finally, inquire about the social culture at the school: Is it close and tight-knit? Is it easy to make friends? Is it cliquy? How are conflicts usually resolved?

Questions to ask schools

- **Curriculum:** What curriculum do you use? Is it mainstream or alternative? What subjects do you teach and how do you teach them? How much, if any, independent and collaborative learning do you offer?
- **Teaching approach:** What is your teaching philosophy? How do your teachers engage students? How do they motivate and challenge them?
- **Class sizes:** What are your class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios?
- **Academic standards:** What are your academic standards? How do they compare with those of your [province's curriculum](#)? How do they compare with those of IB, AP, and other highly academic programs?
- **In-class adaptations:** Do you offer custom in-class adaptations, and if so, which ones? For instance, do you offer differentiated instruction, subject-specific enrichment or acceleration, independent studies, subject-streaming, cyber learning, or career exploration?
- **Academic focus:** Do you have a particular academic focus like science or the arts?
- **Extracurriculars:** Which after-school classes, programs, and clubs do you have? Do you offer volunteer or community service opportunities? How about travel and exchange programs?
- **Out-of-class resources:** Do you have academic counselling, learning resource, psychology, or health and wellness centres or departments?
- **Out-of-class staff:** Do you have academic advisors, guidance counsellors, social workers, or psychologists? How about tutors or subject-specific support staff (like reading or math specialists)?
- **Special education:** Do you have full- or part-time dedicated special education classes?
- **Gifted learning:** Do you have full- or part-time dedicated gifted classes?

Notes
