

Questions to ask elementary 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?
- **Extracurriculars:** Which after-school classes, programs, and clubs do you have? Do have after-school sports, arts, or educational programs? Is everyone eligible for these?
- **Out-of-class staff:** Do you have guidance counsellors, social workers, or psychologists? How about tutors or subject-specific support staff (like reading or math specialists)?
- **Values:** What kinds of values do you try to instill in your students? For instance, do you emphasize kindness and inclusivity, and if so, how? Does your curriculum include character education? If so, how?
- **Social skills:** How do you help kids with their social skills like cooperation, sharing, listening, respecting personal space, communication, reading body language, and empathy?
- **Student community:** What is your student community like? Is it close-knit and cohesive? Is it inclusive? Do kids generally get along?
- **Location:** What city is it in? How close are you to it? Is it easily accessible by car and public transportation?
- **Cost:** How much does it cost, and what does this cost include? Is it affordable for your family? Are financial aid, subsidies, or sibling discounts offered?
- **Environment:** What type of learning environment is used? What kinds of materials and equipment are in the classroom? When are they used and how often?
- **Specialized learning:** Does it offer individualized learning? Does it tailor teaching to specific students, where appropriate? Or is teaching more on the “one-size-fits-all” model?
- **Special needs:** Does it offer support for kids with special needs? If so, which special needs (for instance, learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, giftedness, behavioural issues, physical disabilities, etc.)? And how does it support children with special needs?
- **Communication:** How does the administration communicate with parents? How do teachers communicate with parents? Is it easy to set up meetings?
- **Recess:** Does the school offer recess each day? If so, for how long and how often?
- **Outdoor time:** Weather permitting, are kids given outdoor time each day? If so, how often and how much?