

The Good Schools Guide

How we select our schools

A guide for parents and schools



2023/24

The Good Schools Guide School Selection Policy

Updated January 2024

POLICY SUMMARY

The purpose of The Good Schools Guide is to provide parents with independent, candid reviews to enable them to make informed decisions when choosing a school for their child. This policy provides an outline of how we select schools for inclusion in The Guide.

WHAT DOES A 'GOOD' SCHOOL LOOK LIKE?

'Good' is subjective and means that, in our judgement, the school serves its pupils and their parents effectively, is likely to continue doing well for the next decade (ie it has what it takes to see your child through), and we would recommend it for a child who we think would flourish there. Data, exam results, Ofsted or Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) reports and our own visits to the school are all considerations, but most important of all is what parents and others tell us of their experience and understanding of the school's ethos, culture and purpose. Fundamental to our school selection process is the belief that every child is individual and has different needs. Our reviews cover every part of a school's offering from educational ethos and pastoral support to the importance placed on extracurricular activities, diversity and inclusivity and SEN, as well as hard data such as public examination results.

Our reviews are written for parents by parents. A school may be considered outstanding by one parent and less so by another. For instance, 'a clear focus on examination results' will read as high praise to some, as a red flag to others. Many 'good' schools have imperfections – which we choose to note in our reviews when it is useful to parents for us to do so – and many do not achieve impressive examination results: indeed, we search hardest for schools that bring out the best in children regardless of their raw academic ability.

We encourage readers to use examination results data, inspection reports and school prospectuses alongside our reviews – we do not reproduce the wealth of detail that is in them.

Please tell us whenever you disagree with us or think we have missed a good school: parents talking to us is how most schools have got into the Guide (and have occasionally been removed from it).

Special needs schools and specialist providers

Our aim is to support parents of children with individual learning needs in making informed choices. For that reason, we review schools or units that accept pupils who may otherwise have been educated in mainstream settings. We no longer review schools for children with severe and multiple conditions for whom mainstream schooling is not an option, although some reviews of this type of school are currently still published on our website.

We look for schools that support children with special educational needs, as well as their families, in a creative and sympathetic manner. This might be by collaboration with health, social care and voluntary organisations, or later in the student's education by offering appropriate and thoughtful guidance towards appropriate work placements, vocational training, apprenticeships and FE colleges.

International schools

Education has no borders; what 'good' looks like in a school remains the same regardless of its location. We are interested in schools around the world that meet the needs of families with a global outlook; those who are living in, or relocating to, a new country or those seeking an international school environment in their home country as an alternative to the national provision.

We include schools that offer a quality of teaching and delivery of learning environment that meets or exceeds global standards as well as the diverse needs of internationally minded and mobile families. We offer a candid view of these schools based on the experiences of families currently attending them. We prefer newly established schools – even those affiliated to well-known school groups – to have public examination results for two years before considering them for inclusion in The Good Schools Guide. Earlier inclusion is at the discretion of the international editor.

Tutor companies

We review tutor agencies that have been trading for a minimum of two years and that have at least 20 tutors serving over 20 families. Those selected for review are identified via our writers, consultants and local sources as well as through our professional relationship with The Tutors' Association, in particular its awards scheme that identifies and rewards excellence in the tutor agency market.

We look to see that an agency is well and safely run and carry out a detailed assessment based on comprehensive access to tutors and customers, before compiling an in-depth review written in the same candid style – and with the same critical distance – as we do with school reviews.

ADDING NEW SCHOOLS TO THE GUIDE

As well as working with our national network of writers and advisors to identify candidates, we are always keen to hear suggestions of schools to be added to the Guide.

We look at schools in the context of other schools that serve the same catchment (geographical, academic, religion, sport, art, pastoral etc).

What parents tell us about the school, as always, matters most.

REMOVING A SCHOOL FROM THE GUIDE

If we judge that a school no longer meets our criteria we will remove it from the Guide. This is not a wholly negative judgement – there are many estimable schools that are not in the Guide – but is an indication that it is no longer one that we choose to recommend. Decision to remove a school from The Good Schools Guide is taken by committee at the highest level.

Selection of schools is entirely at the discretion of The Good Schools Guide's editorial team.

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