BOARDING SCHOOLS — GUIDE

How to choose a boarding school

A practical shortlist method based on the child, boarding routine, support, school evidence and the written offer.

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Start with the child. Write down what makes a good school day for them. Include learning needs, friendships, interests, language, health and how they ask for help. Let the child state what worries them without turning the discussion into an interview.

Set the limits before browsing

Make a family brief. Separate essential conditions from preferences. Include travel, budget in the school's currency, curriculum, boarding pattern and support that must exist from arrival. A school with attractive grounds can still fail an essential condition.

Use school directories to find possible matches. Do not treat a directory entry as proof of suitability. TABS provides a boarding school search. CAIS publishes information for families considering its member schools. These are useful discovery sources, not a personal recommendation. Sources: TABS, Boarding Schools and CAIS, fetched 2026-11-10.

Ask about the boarding house

Send the same questions to each school:

- Who is on duty overnight, and how can a child reach them?
- Who stays on campus at weekends? What happens when the house closes?
- How are room changes, bullying concerns and homesickness handled?
- How do parents contact the house when the usual staff member is away?
- What support is available during evenings, not just lesson time?
- Can staff meet the child's specific learning, dietary or health needs?

Ask for a written answer to a support promise. Record the staff role that owns it. A general assurance such as "we support every child" does not explain the service.

Read evidence before a visit

Ask for the latest full inspection report and the school's response. Check the school name, campus, date and boarding scope. ISI publishes its inspection framework and report guidance. The framework explains what its inspection covers. Source: ISI, Inspections Explained, fetched 2026-11-10.

Use an unresolved finding to form a direct question. Ask what changed, when it changed and how the school checks the change now. Do not use a paid badge or association logo as a substitute for this work.

Compare the same things

Keep a sheet with columns for requirement, school answer, evidence link, question still open and family decision. Use "not confirmed" where evidence is missing. Do not turn missing facts into a low score or a guessed answer.

During a visit, ask to see the route from the boarding house to meals and lessons. Discuss an ordinary weekend. Give the child time to speak privately with you afterwards. Keep their reaction separate from your own impression.

Before the deposit

Request the current fee schedule, enrolment terms, house closure dates and support plan. Check these against your brief. Keep another school under consideration until the practical details are clear. Choose from evidence you can explain, not pressure to accept quickly.

Frequently asked questions

Should a ranking decide the shortlist?

Use your child's needs and evidence from each school. A position in a list does not tell you how a boarding house will work for your child.

What should we ask on a visit?

Ask to see an ordinary boarding day, meet house staff and discuss a specific support need. Record the answer and the person responsible.