

How will your school look after my child?

A solid mentoring system prevents, detects and deals well with pupils' problems, says **Catherine Paver**. Here she suggests what to look for in a prospective school

Good schools make children feel safe, valued and happy so that they can flourish in the classroom and beyond. It is important to know how well a school looks after its pupils.

"Academic achievement is not the only mark of an excellent school," says Holly Harris, research administrator at the Independent Schools Council (ISC). Nevertheless, she adds, "There seems to be some correlation between pastoral care and academic performance." Putting pastoral care at the top of your list will help you to find a school where your child will thrive.

>> DAY AND BOARDING
"Pastoral care matters just as much in a day environment as it does in a boarding one," says Tim Haynes, headmaster

of Tonbridge School in Kent. Yet parents are more likely to enquire about the pastoral care at a boarding school. Even then, they do not always ask to see accommodation, and it is important to do so.

>> BASIC INFORMATION
The school's website should give you details about pastoral care as well as a full copy of its latest inspection report. If not, ask for these. Reviews of schools and the right questions to pose can be found in *The Good Schools Guide* at www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk. Usefully, the reviews are regularly updated.

>> SCHOOL HOUSES AND YEAR GROUPS
Schools divide themselves in various ways, which is

partly why every institution has a different atmosphere. Year groups are "horizontal", featuring pupils of the same age; while houses are "vertical", comprising pupils of different ages. Pastoral care may or may not be given along these lines; check with the school. Ofsted reports can give you a sense of how the school system works and how well it functions. But be warned – school policies change, so check the inspection date.

>> DOES THE SCHOOL KNOW ITS PUPILS?
Whatever the size of the school, if the answer is "yes", then the pastoral system probably works. "You can tell by the expression on a child's face if there's something wrong," says Marcus Peel,

headmaster of Malsis School in Yorkshire. "But, crucially, do you have staff who will do something about it?"

You need to know who will be the main person your child can go to for help. Will it be the housemaster or form tutor, for instance, and will they look after your child for one year, or more? Think of some specific problems and ask the school how it would deal with them.

Good teacher-pupil relationships are fostered beyond the classroom as well as within it. "When teachers are outdoors in the rain congratulating their pupils on an activity, they get to know them as human beings," says David Dunn, headmaster of Yarm School in Stockton-on-Tees. Vitrally, getting to know



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