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Picking a pre-school

8 questions to ask

Understanding a pre-school's teaching philosophy and knowing how it can cater to children with different needs, among other things, can help parents make a better choice



Children from MOE Kindergarten @ Valour in Punggol work together to keep a ball in the air in a collaborative game at the field shared with its primary school. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



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with her husband Muhammad Irfan Simatupang, 35, a procurement executive.

Location and cost are common factors cited by parents when looking for a pre-school. These aside, educators suggest eight questions parents can ask in order to make a better choice.

1. WHAT IS YOUR PRE-SCHOOL'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY?

Each school has its own approach to learning, for instance, play-based, inquiry-based, Montessori



Children from a Nursery 2 class in E-Bridge Pre-School were given a block of clay and no instructions, to explore how clay can become anything a child imagines it to be. PHOTO: E-BRIDGE PRE-SCHOOL

or structured academic programmes.

Understanding the school's vision will help parents decide if it aligns with their beliefs and their child's learning style, says Madam Zainab Mohamed Hussain, centre head of MK @ Elias Park.

One method is the Reggio Emilia Approach, which emphasises child-led, inquiry-based learning. E-Bridge Pre-School is a Reggio Emilia-inspired pre-school and has projects that encourage critical thinking and collaboration.

Its spokesperson suggests parents ask about how learning is made visible to them, for instance, through portfolios, documentation panels or digital platforms.

Parents can also ask how the curriculum nurtures key skills, like problem-solving and creativity.

"Understanding a school's curriculum and educational philosophy helps parents assess how it translates into daily interactions and learning experiences," says its spokesperson.

2. CAN THE PRE-SCHOOL CATER TO MY CHILD'S NEEDS?

Pre-schools offer a range of programmes in addition to their core curriculum.

Some may be able to cater to children with special learning needs, while others may offer enrichment programmes.

For example, at PCF Sparkletots Preschool, collaborations with community partners such as SportSG and the National Arts Council provide physical and artistic development opportunities for children.

Its chief operating officer, Ms Marini Khamis, advises parents to look for an environment that balances academics with opportunities for holistic development.

"Research highlights the importance of a well-rounded curriculum that integrates academic learning with play-based activities, the arts and physical development," she says.

Children with special learning or developmental needs will benefit from attending a pre-school that proactively identifies and supports them.

"Early intervention can significantly enhance a child's progress, providing tailored support that fosters confidence and growth," she says.

Madam Zainab adds that parents can also ask how the school supports children's social and emotional growth.

"Early childhood is the most crucial stage for developing skills such as communication, cooperation, empathy and self-regulation. Parents should ask how the school fosters these skills, whether through structured activities, teacher guidance or a positive school culture," she says.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF NUR ADILLA NAZLI

This way, Hassan can be familiar with a primary school. When he goes to Primary 1, he will not be too overwhelmed by the new environment.



MADAM NUR ADILLA NAZLI (above, second from right), on signing up her five-year-old son at MOE Kindergarten @ Elias Park, which is located within the premises of Elias Park Primary School. She is seen here with her husband Muhammad Irfan Simatupang and their sons, Ibrahim (second from left) and Hassan

3. WHAT ARE THE TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS?

Educators play a vital role in the learning environment and their teaching will be impacted by their qualifications, experience and continuous professional development.

"A pre-school is only as good as its educators. Experienced, well-trained and passionate teachers create a nurturing and stimulating learning environment where children thrive," says the E-Bridge Pre-School spokesperson.

Parents can ask about staff stability – long-serving staff indicate a well-run and supportive school environment. Also, observe if teachers are warm, engaged and fostering a love for learning, she adds.

Ms Coreen Soh, NTUC First Campus' chief child development officer, suggests parents consider if the pre-school is part of a larger organisation that invests in its teachers' professional development, continuous curriculum update and pedagogical research.

Parents can ask how frequently teachers participate in professional development courses and whether they are encouraged to pursue further education.

"Ongoing professional development ensures that teachers stay updated on the latest educational practices and can continuously improve their teaching skills," she says.

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