



**THE BOARDING  
SCHOOL COLLECTIVE**

## **CHOOSING A BOARDING SCHOOL**

### *A Practical Checklist for Families*

*Choosing a boarding school is one of the biggest decisions a family will make.*

*After speaking with thousands of families over more than two decades of boarding school expos, we've pulled together the questions parents tell us matter most. Use this checklist as a starting point - at an expo, on a school tour, or around the kitchen table at home.*

*There is no perfect school, only the school that feels right for your child.*

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## SCHOOL POLICIES AND VALUES

- Do the school's values feel like a good fit for our family and for my child?
- Does the school clearly promote kindness, respect, inclusion and belonging?
- Am I comfortable with the school's approach to behaviour, discipline and restorative practice?
- Does the school have clear anti-bullying, child safety and complaints policies?
- How does the school manage conflict, friendship issues and social challenges within the boarding house?
- Does the school have clear expectations around digital behaviour, social media use and online conduct?
- How are mobile phones and devices managed during the school day, in the boarding house and overnight?
- Are there student leadership opportunities that help build confidence, responsibility and community?
- If faith is part of the school's identity, does that sit comfortably with our family?
- Does the school feel genuinely warm, grounded and caring - not just impressive on paper?

## ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- Does the curriculum offer the subjects, pathways and opportunities my child may want to pursue?
- Will the learning environment suit my child academically - extension, support, pace and expectations?
- How are classes structured, and will that suit my child's confidence and learning style?
- What does academic support look like for boarders after hours?
- Is there supervised prep or homework time, and is it calm, structured and age-appropriate?
- What technology is provided or expected for learning?
- How are progress, assessment and reports communicated to parents?
- Are there strong careers, tertiary or vocational pathway supports?
- Will this school challenge my child appropriately without overwhelming them?

## EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- Does the school cater for my child's interests - sport, music, arts, agriculture, leadership, service or clubs?
- Is there enough variety for a child who may still be discovering what they love?
- Are weekend and after-school activities well organised for boarders?
- If my child's preferred activity is not offered, can it be pursued externally?
- How are transport, supervision and permissions managed for extra-curricular commitments?
- Are there extra costs attached to certain activities, camps, competitions or private coaching?
- Does the school value participation and enjoyment, not just high performance?
- Will my child have enough to do outside class time to feel connected and engaged?

## LOCATION AND ACCESS

- Is the school realistic and manageable for us to get to from home?
- What are the travel options at the start and end of term, for exeats and emergencies?
- How easy is it for family members or trusted friends to visit or take my child out?
- Is the school near airports, bus or rail connections if that matters for our family?
- Are there nearby services the school uses for sport, medical appointments or outings?
- If siblings are at different schools, is that manageable for weekends and logistics?
- How does the school support new families who live a long way away?

## PARENTAL COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

- How does the school communicate with parents - email, phone, app or parent portal?
- How often will I hear from boarding staff, and about what?
- Who do I contact first if I have a concern - Head of House, boarding supervisor, tutor, year coordinator?
- How closely do the academic and boarding teams work together?
- Will I have opportunities to meet key staff before and during the year?
- Are there parent groups, welcome weekends or other ways to build connection with the community?
- What is the school's philosophy around parent contact with boarders?
- How are homesickness, friendship issues or wellbeing concerns communicated to families?

## BOARDING FACILITIES

- Will my child feel safe, comfortable and known in the boarding house?
- What are the rooms, bathrooms, common spaces and study areas actually like?
- Is the level of supervision appropriate for my child's age and stage?
- Who is on duty overnight, on weekends and in emergencies?
- What medical, counselling and wellbeing support is available to boarders?
- If my child is worried, upset or unwell, who can they talk to and how quickly is support provided?
- How are meals, dietary requirements and allergies managed?
- What are the routines around prep, lights out, laundry, leave and downtime?
- Are there healthy weekend recreation options and enough structure for younger boarders?
- Is there a peer support or buddy system for new boarders?
- Are facilities and routines suitable for the number and ages of boarders enrolled?

## LEARNING SUPPORT, NEURODIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- How does the school identify and support students with learning differences such as ADHD, dyslexia, autism or processing differences?
- Is there a dedicated learning support or inclusive education team?
- What classroom adjustments or learning supports can be provided?
- How do academic and boarding staff work together to support students who need additional support?
- Can boarding routines be adapted where needed?
- What documentation or assessments will the school require prior to enrolment?
- Is the school open and realistic about the support it can offer?
- If my child is gifted as well as neurodivergent, how is that supported?

## TRANSITION AND FIRST-YEAR BOARDING SUPPORT

- What transition programs exist before the school year begins?
- Is there an orientation day, overnight stay or induction program?
- Are new boarders paired with buddies or mentors?
- How are first-term homesickness and adjustment supported?
- How quickly are concerns noticed and acted upon during the early weeks?
- What support is there for parents during the transition?
- Are there additional supports for younger boarders or students from remote communities?

## DIGITAL LIFE, PHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- What is the school's mobile phone policy during the day and in boarding?
- Are devices collected overnight or locked away for younger year groups?
- How does the school manage cyberbullying or social media misuse?
- How are students taught healthy digital habits and respectful online behaviour?
- What expectations does the school have of parents around digital boundaries?
- How are group chats and social media challenges handled within boarding houses?

## FEES AND CHARGES

- Do I clearly understand what is included in tuition and boarding fees?
- What additional costs should I budget for - uniforms, books, laptops, travel, sport, music, camps or tutoring?
- Are there scholarships, bursaries or financial support options available?
- Is there a payment plan available?
- Are there additional charges for learning support or specialist programs?
- How often do fees increase?
- What happens if boarding is not the right fit and we need to withdraw?

## YOUR SHORTLIST

- Have I visited the school in person, or attended an expo or school tour?
- Have I spoken with boarding staff as well as admissions staff?
- Have I seen the boarding house during a normal school week?
- Can I picture my child belonging here - socially, emotionally and practically?
- Does this school feel right for my child, not just impressive to me?
- What is my child saying after the visit - and what are they not saying?

Sometimes the decision becomes clear when a school simply **feels like the right fit**.

## *Amanda's Five Questions I Always Ask Boarding Schools*

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*Amanda Ferrari - Director, The Boarding School Collective & Mother of former Boarders*

*When I speak with schools from across Australia, these are the questions I always ask.*

**1. How do you support new boarders in their first six weeks?**

*The transition period tells you a lot about a school.*

**2. Who notices first if a child is struggling?**

*And what happens next?*

**3. How do academic staff and boarding staff communicate with each other?**

*The best schools operate as one team around the child.*

**4. What does a normal weekday and weekend actually look like for boarders?**

*Routine and balance are everything.*

**5. If this were your own child, what kind of student thrives here?**

*The honesty in this answer is often the most revealing.*



### *Expo Tip from Amanda*

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*You don't need to ask every question at once.  
Choose your three most important questions and start there.  
The right conversations will follow.*

