

This school or that school?

Do you have a choice of schools for your multiples? If so, you may be in the same position we were—how do we decide which is the best option? We had two schools within stone's throw and we had the option of attending either. So how to decide?

I'm somewhat of an organiser and a planner. My friends might go "Tee-hee" at the modesty of this statement. To be honest, I am an *over*-organiser and an *over*-planner.

So, when it come to comparing schools, I envisaged something akin to a military campaign. For each school there was going to be a Principal's visit, a new entrant class visit, school tour, new entrant teacher interview, ERO report review, comparison of class size, special assistance programme support review, sports and arts curriculum review and you name it—I was going to run the ruler over it and rate it. Only the BEST school would get my babies. If I had thought it was possible to get data on students' achievement after they had left each school I would

have put in for that, as well!

But do you know what? In the end, I didn't even bother with anything else but visit and talk with the Principal (for nearly two hours, I might add), view the classrooms in action and do a cursory glance of the ERO review to make sure it revealed nothing shocking.

Why the change? Well, it eventually occurred to me that even if I got all that information, what would I do with it? I became certain that both schools would do equally well on all counts.

So how to choose? Location wasn't an issue. One school is Catholic and the other not, but we were equally comfortable with the children attending either, so that didn't make much difference. The children's Playcentre is close to both schools so their friends will be at both.

At the end of the day, there was one key difference that meant that we prioritised one school over the other—

and that was one school went through to the end of Year 8 (Form 2, if you are as old as I am) and therefore we would not have to send the kids away to an Intermediate unless we chose to do so.

So, once we had decided that was the key factor for us, it became a simple process. We would visit and view that school, and unless there was anything to make us uncomfortable, that was it: decision made, our kids would be enrolled there.

As above, our time spent with the Principal was nearly two hours long and given how busy they are, that was the first thing that impressed me. He gave thorough and thoughtful answers to the questions we had about initiating the new entrants, aspects of the curriculum, their experiences of schooling multiples, the interactions between the school and the community.

We took a night just to make sure, and then confirmed our places for the boys the next day.

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So, if you're in the position of wanting to choose a school, I don't really have any advice as such—but, if you can narrow it down to one school at the top of the list, then focus your energy on deciding if there is anything that worries or concerns you. If talking about these with the school doesn't resolve the concerns you have, then you will be able to then turn and focus on your next choice. Maybe it might mean that you go through a process of

getting more information from both (or more) schools until you have some clarity.

At the end of the day, no matter what you choose it won't be perfect. But I think by going through a process to choose the school that includes spending quite a bit of time talking with the Principal and other staff, you have begun a process of open communication that will help support raising any

concerns in the future.

So, now that the school is decided, does anyone have any tips on how to cope when your entire family turns five at once and you lose your 'babies'? I'm simultaneously terrified and excited at the thought! Maybe more on that in another issue.

Nicci Coffey is mum to twins Archer and Toby, aged 4.

How do multiples do at school—and what do parents need to know?



George and Harry Williams (nearly four) who THINK they are ready for school!

The Curtin University researchers found very little evidence that multiples are less intelligent than singletons, although slightly higher numbers of multiples may experience learning difficulties (possibly due to higher rates of prematurity and associated long-term problems).

The research

The most complete Australian data, from the 1975 *Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Study of School Performance*, looked at 13,000 children, half aged 10.5 and 14—unfortunately, more recent Australian studies do not differentiate between twins and singletons). The results showed:

- At age 10—twin boys were well behind the singletons and twin girls a bit behind, in their mastery of literacy
- By age 14, the twin girls, but not the boys, had essentially caught-up with the singletons, with over 70% possessing reading skills sufficient to "survive" in Australian society—this figure was only 40% for the twin boys. Noticeably more were below average

in both the accuracy of their reading and in reading comprehension, with about one-third so far behind that they would be labelled as "reading disabled".

The *Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS)* were developed by the University of Durham to measure the children's starting point on school entry and their progress throughout the school years—this is fundamental to assessment, as it is not just the final achievement that matters, but children's comparative progress taking into account their starting point. If children are a long way behind their peers at the start, then rising to average levels is a great achievement.

The PIPS baseline data shows a modest difference between twins and singletons in the children ready to start school in 2000. Multiples were a little behind in basic reading and mathematical skills: this should not be an issue for most families or teachers. However, it is essential to ensure that appropriate intervention is given to the multiples who are entering school below their peers. This may include consideration of delayed school entry as these issues may be developmental.

Why problems may arise and who is at risk?

Comparing the assessment style of both PIPS and ACER revealed that INATTENTION and IMPULSIVITY were the key issues for twin boys—that is, failing to concentrate and guessing. For example, when a child sees the word "bat" but reads it as "bag", their first problem is in reading accuracy and distorted comprehension is only a secondary issue. Such an accuracy problem is more common in multiples and it may well happen that a child, on seeing a word, may guess at any word of roughly the right length or beginning with the same letter. Certainly this can happen also in single-born children but both parents and teachers comment on how common it is in multiples.

Problems of inattention and impulsivity are key components of ADHD, which is more common in multiples, and is associated with speech and reading problems. Of course it is important not to assume all

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