

# FINDING THE BEST SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS 101

Taking the Journey TOGETHER



# FINDING THE BEST SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD

Finding the best school for your child is all about fit. If you are considering private schools, each school has unique and distinct qualities. Our starter guide can help you focus on finding the school that best suits your child's strengths, interests, talents and challenges.

## 1. Consider your priorities

On the surface, private schools may seem alike. Look deeper and you'll discover that schools have different focuses and strengths. Before you search for the best fit, think about what is most important to you and why. Start by considering these factors:

- **Learning style of your child** — what kind of environment and approach engages and motivates your child to ask questions and investigate the answers?
- **Programmatic preferences** — in addition to strong academics, what extra-curricular programs do you prioritize? Robust arts? Music? Technology? Second Language as core? Character education?
- **School size** — are you looking for a larger school or something smaller and more intimate?
- **School diversity** — how important is diversity and inclusion to your family?
- **School structure** — do you prefer PreK-8th grade or PreK-12th grade?



### Why consider private school?

Private schools, also known as independent schools, are mission-driven — meaning they adopt a philosophy, values and approach that serves the best interest of students. Private schools also give teachers more freedom to elevate curriculum and introduce innovative lessons. Private schools often invest more in the arts and technology, and offer a strong sense of community among faculty, students and parents.



Helpful  
Tips

### TOP TIP

Ask for a copy of the school's latest newsletter, blog or welcome book; some schools may post publications on their website. In addition to giving you insight into the values, priorities and culture of the school, reading these publications can help you discern the difference between private school and other options.



# PreK-8TH or PreK-12TH WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

**Some private schools are structured as PreK – 8th grade, while others continue through high school.** Each has distinct advantages.

PreK–12th grade may appeal to parents prepared to commit to a school through high school and who prefer a one- time admissions process. Parents who choose a PreK–8th grade school often see 8th grade as a natural transition point and opportunity for students to consider the next step for high school—public, private and more.

**A PS3s – 8th grade independent school like Holy Trinity offers these advantages:**

- **Childhood is Preserved** — Too often, young adolescents feel pressure to grow up too fast in order to fit in among older peers. A school that educates children through childhood can focus on the here and now. In an environment that provides a healthy buffer against intense social pressures, HT students are encouraged to be mature while taking on ever-increasing amounts of age- appropriate responsibility.
- **Leadership Comes Naturally** — Since middle school is the culmination of a Holy Trinity education, seventh and eighth graders become natural leaders and role models for the entire school community. Offerings like our Student Council, Buddy Program and Corporal Works of Mercy foster confidence, self-awareness, communication and other leadership skills that help students make a successful transition to high school.
- **Abundance of Options in High School** — HT eighth graders are well prepared to move on to high school. Often they are placed in advanced classes in both private and public schools. By the time they graduate HT, their academic strengths, learning styles, personal passions and community connections are firmly developed making them more comfortable with the transition to higher learning.



## **How do I assess the quality of private schools?**

These educational standards can provide insight into a school's commitment to quality:

- Is the school accredited? By whom? For how long?
- What is the level of experience of the teaching staff?
- What kind of professional development is available to faculty and staff?
- Does the school have a main priority, eg: STEM or STREAM

**Helpful Tips**

## **TOP TIP**

Reviewing the school's priority focus is a great way to assess the quality of a private school, since it demonstrates that an institution is committed to growing, changing and improving to meet the needs of its students. Check how long this has been in place and what the school has been able to accomplish. For example, HT is a multiple year Governor's STEM grant award winner.





# DO YOUR HOMEWORK

2. Once you understand the priorities you want in school, you can investigate private schools to identify good matches. You will get a better sense of the private school landscape if you do the research yourself, rather than rely on word-of-mouth or the experiences of others. Start by asking some basics:

- What is the school's mission and philosophy? Ask for examples of how the mission and educational philosophy are practiced on a typical school day.
- How does the school measure student achievement and progress?
- What qualifications do the teaching staff have?
- What is the average class size? Keep in mind, class size will give you a much better indication of the amount of individualized attention you can expect than teacher-student ratio.
- How does the school handle discipline issues?
- How many students does the school have?
- What type of student is the school looking for?

**It's also important to assess if a school will be a good fit as your child grows older. Asking these questions can help you make that determination:**

- How are students' interests and passions nurtured over time?
- Are there dedicated facilities and buildings to accommodate early childhood, lower, middle and upper school students?
- What leadership opportunities does the school offer as students age?
- How do homework assignments change over time?
- Which high schools and/or colleges do students attend after graduation?
- What percentage of students attend their school of choice after graduation?

**If you decide to visit a school, asking these questions can help you further discern the right fit:**

- Is this a classroom my child will want to spend time in?
- Are the teachers dedicated to helping students learn?
- Does the school seem capable of bringing out the best talents of my son or daughter?
- Will my child thrive in this school?

## What do private school admissions look for?

- A clear understanding of your child's strengths and challenges
- Students who will thrive — academically, socially and emotionally — in the school's environment
- Families with a genuine appreciation of the school's educational philosophy, mission and vision

Helpful Tips

## TOP TIP

Private schools don't expect "perfect" children and parents, so it's actually to your benefit to present your genuine selves throughout the admissions process. Pushing to get your child into a school that ultimately turns out not to be a good match may put him or her at a disadvantage in the long run.

# 3. START THE PROCESS

Once you identify private schools that best suit your child, you can start the admissions process. Private/independent schools have an application process with specific timelines and deadlines (see example below). You may also need to fill in an inquiry link, schedule a meeting and/or class visit. Here are a few tips to keep in mind about school visits and interviews:

- For young children entering an early childhood program or kindergarten, schools are generally looking for school readiness
- Older children may spend time in the classroom and/or interview with a faculty member or administrator or even attend a shadow day
- Resist “coaching” your child before a visit or interview — schools can sense when a child is being his or her authentic self. If a child is a great fit, you don’t have to “act;” the school will see it.
- Your child will take their cue from you — they’ll avoid feeling stressed out if you remain calm. Let them know they are going to visit a school to see if they might like it one day. Be sure to give them a hug and remind them — and yourself — that you are looking for the right school.

Niche.com is a terrific tool for parents searching for the best-fit. On their site you can easily see the many different schools in your area and their points of difference.

<https://www.niche.com/k12/holy-trinity-catholic-school-des-moines-ia/>



## Sample Private School Timeline

**September - November:** Begin contacting schools, schedule campus tours, visits and events.

**November - January:** Start filling out applications and inquiry links. Schools may schedule a meeting, shadow day or classroom visit for your child during this period. Attend Open Houses and meet the teachers.

**February - May:** Families applying for tuition assistance typically file the necessary forms during this period as well. Schools notify applicants of admissions and tuition assistance decisions.

Take the first step and take a tour of Holy Trinity Catholic School online [HERE](#)

Ready to find out more? Please go to [https://htschool.schooladminonline.com/portal/new\\_inquiry](https://htschool.schooladminonline.com/portal/new_inquiry)

# PARENTS GUIDE TO EDUCATIONAL TERMINOLOGY

Here is a guide to terminology, educational practices and acronyms parents may encounter when touring Holy Trinity and other independent schools.

## TERMINOLOGY & EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

**Accreditation:** A process of review that validates that a school is meeting or exceeding its standards for academics, curriculum, outcomes and resources to support its educational goals. Accreditation indicates that a school is achieving its stated purposes and is on firm ground to sustain its mission for the foreseeable future. Holy Trinity is accredited by the state of Iowa.

### ASSESSMENT

The measurement of a student's learning and performance. A student can be assessed using a variety of criteria, including standardized tests; having the student complete a complex task such as a research report, oral presentation or scientific investigation; and evaluating the student's portfolio, which is a collection of his or her body of work over time.

**Best Practices:** Classroom instructional strategies that have been demonstrated and accepted by the professional educational community to inform and enrich student learning.

**Character Education:** Essential part of a child's social and emotional development that equips students with the skills to be their best selves. Character education is an integral part of a Holy Trinity education that is embodied in the Trinity Traits: Being Respectful, Responsible and Safe

### COLLABORATE:

Individuals working together to solve a problem or accomplish goals.

**Cognitive Development:** The changes in the way children think, process information and learn as they develop more complex ways of understanding the world.

**Critical Thinking:** A deliberate thought process that develops objective analysis and evaluation of an issue or problem in order to form a conclusion. When students are engaged in critical thinking, they are learning how to:

- Find, analyze and make sense of facts, data and trends
- Assess the veracity of sources, especially online sources
- Make distinctions between facts and points of view
- Present and defend an argument or intellectual position

**Differentiated Instruction:** An instructional technique that includes various methods to teach content and assess learning. Since small classes and strong teacher-student relationships are hallmarks of an independent school education, HT is quite effective at using differentiated instruction to help students reach their fullest potential based on their individual needs, readiness, interests and learning styles.

**Diversity:** Recognizing a variety of student characteristics including those of age, gender, physical abilities, viewpoints, race and ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. Diversity is one of HT's highest priorities to provide a safe, positive and nurturing environment in which to appreciate and understand differences.

**Experiential Learning:** Process of learning through experience that also involves reflecting on the work and outcomes students produce.

At HT experiential learning is embedded in every grade. Preschool students study the life cycle by planting and growing food in a garden, the fifth graders walk Beaverdale while learning about early Iowa and eighth graders deepen their understanding of supporting community through their works of mercy benefitting causes they believe in

---

**Higher Order Thinking Skills:** The ability to understand complex concepts and apply conflicting pieces of information to solve a problem that may have more than one correct answer.

#### **INCLUSION:**

The practice of educating all children of various needs and capabilities in the same classroom. Inclusion is also sometimes used when referring to diversity to indicate that diverse individuals are not just accepted into the community, but empowered to be a part of it in every way.

**Individualized Education:** A practice that provides each student with lessons and assignments according to his or her needs.

---

**Inquiry-Based Learning:** An instructional method where students create questions about a unit of study and work to answer their questions through a rigorous exploration of the topic.

---

**Interdisciplinary Curriculum:** The practice of incorporating multiple disciplines such as Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts and Math into the study of one theme or topic. For example, when students study Ancient Egypt, along with investigating the social order of an early civilization they may also study the geography of the region, explore the ecology of the Nile River, recreate artifacts in art class, learn about the science of mummification and the gods of the Pharaohs.

---

**STEM LAB Maker Space:** Dedicated space outfitted with tools and technology for students to create, code, invent and learn.

#### **MANIPULATIVES:**

Any objects—for example, blocks, small cubes or coins—that can be used to represent or model a problem situation and develop a mathematical concept. Manipulatives have been credited with developing authentic understanding of mathematics as students use the tools to create concrete evidence of thinking, reasoning and problem solving.

**Modeling:** The process of demonstrating to a student how to do a task so that the student can emulate the model. At HT, modeling often includes helping students think aloud or talking about how to work through a problem or task.

---

**Peer-to-Peer Learning:** Learning strategy that encourages students “to learn with and from each other.” Rather than receive information and knowledge from the teacher, students are involved in the search, collection and analysis of information, and form conclusions through questioning and discussions with one another.

---

**Play-Based Education:** Approach to early childhood education that provides a context for learning in which children organize and make sense of their world as they actively engage with materials, people, ideas and their environment.

---

#### **ACRONYMS**

**STEM:** While all schools teach science and math, dedicated STEM programs are deeply focused on developing the capabilities students need to compete in a global economy. A STEM lab support this with the latest technology.

---

**STREAM:** Integrated learning approach that utilizes Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Math in hands-on and collaborative ways to solve real-world problems. The STREAM initiative at HT includes a robust Arts program to further develop students’ innovative thinking along with a faith-filled foundation to better prepare them to be civic minded and community centric.

Learn more about Holy Trinity’s approach to [STREAM HERE](#)