



High time ... Janet Green and her year 7 daughter, Laura Mack, spent years planning for high school. Photo: Marco Del Grande

Put on the thinking cap

Parents and children need to agree on the choice of school, writes **Melinda Ham.**

LAURA MACK has just started year 7 at MLC School in Burwood but her parents spent a couple of years doing the research to find the right school for their daughter, who is now 12.

"We started thinking about her high school when she was in year 5 and it was a regular topic of ongoing conversation for months and months after that," says her mother, Janet Green.

"Laura is a quite good all-rounder – not a specialist in one area – and we wanted a school that would let her pursue any of her interests in music, sport and visual arts and at the same time encourage her to challenge herself and try new things."

The family looked at websites of government and independent schools and attended open days for about six schools.

"Our decision became clearer as we visited each school and got a sense of the environment and their approach to education, their pastoral care and support system," Green says.

Choosing a school for your child is probably one of the most important decisions you make in a lifetime, says Barbara Stone, the principal of MLC and also the national chairwoman of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia, an independent, professional body.

"It's up there along with deciding whether to get married and have children.

"Choice of a school has such an impact on the growth of your son or daughter that you want to do a lot more research than relying on dinner-party gossip."

Stone suggests a three-step approach to

reach this pivotal decision. First, parents and their children need to examine what is important to them as a family and to their child in particular, including family values, their child's strengths and goals.

"Make a list with everyone involved and make sure that you and your children agree on the list," she says.

Second, parents need to research schools that fit their criteria. Look at school websites, annual reports, relevant results (academic, sports, music) and the qualifications and experience of teachers.

Third, first-hand experience of the schools is needed. Families should meet teachers, parents and students from the school, Stone says. Visit the school on open day and on a regular school day.

The Independent Schools Council of Australia recently researched where parents look for information when choosing a non-governmental school.

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Barbara Stone, principal

The 401 parents surveyed online were allowed to tick more than one box.

About 5 per cent said they read newspaper articles on the subject, 8 per cent looked at adverts, 9 per cent at school websites, 27 per cent spoke to school staff, 29 per cent went to open days at the school, 38 per cent relied on personal experience – they or one of their relatives or other children had attended the school – while 59 per cent of parents talked to other parents about the school.

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW executive director, Geoff Newcombe, says parents need to look at more than one source to make the most informed decision.