

# Relocation And Education - Pitfalls And Solutions

**There is little that concerns a parent more than their child's education, and it is also important to remember that the schooling is not just about education - though of course that is primary - but that schools and children are often the springboards that unlock a new social life for a family in a particular area, further underpinning the success of the move.**

This would be true for a family who lived their whole life in one town - but when a family is moving internationally, often on successive assignments, the challenge of securing continuity in good education becomes vital to a successful posting.

## Aspiration And Reality

At the heart of an education assessment lies the creative tension - common in many aspects of life - of what a family want, their "aspirations", and what is actually feasible on the ground, the "reality".

Aspiration is sometimes viewed as a bad thing, certainly in the state sector, but I definitely see it as a positive - parents wanting the best for their children.

We want the circles 'Aspiration and Reality' to overlap as much as possible - the wider the overlap grows, the more school choices a family will have to work from.

There are many factors that impact on the overlap - global mobility policies, for example funding of independent school fees, would be one.

Yet there are other factors that can be manageable with good guidance and advice, some out of the family's control "on the

ground", others within their "family influence".

## Family Influencers

### The "Google" search and understanding the journey

Parents can draw from a number of sources to build their knowledge bank prior to a move - plugging into the network of families already on assignment, friends who live (or have lived) in their proposed destination country and time spent "Googling" on the web.

All three have some merit but will be blind to the key component of the relocation - the precise individual needs and requirements of the children themselves.

Parents can have advice ringing in their ears, but can be completely unsure whether they are listening to Bach or tinnitus.

It is important to rebalance this "white noise" by getting the family to think hard about what is important to them - not only focusing on the current move, but evaluating the past and considering future outcomes, so that they have truly understand the "education journey" they are on. This provides parents with a firm foundation to move forward from.

## The Rules Of The Game

Every nation's education system is unique. Even a global curriculum - such as the International Baccalaureate - has a myriad of variances between countries.

Because of this, every education system has rules that need to be adhered to. These might be deadlines for applying, assessment levels required or residency qualifications.

From the start it is essential that a family (and the parent company) get a grip on these

rules - ignorance - or simply trying riding roughshod over them - is the most common element in a school search becoming more complicated than it need be.

## Housing Preferences

There are lots of reasons that families may have a preference for an area - it could be that they had lived there when younger and child-free. It might be a recommendation from a friend. Or there are some areas - for example with the Korean community and New Malden in south-west London - that already have an established support network for expats.

The "but" here is that the more a family is fixed on a location, the less flexible they are to look at schooling options that might be better suited to their needs, yet fall outside of that district.

Again, the education provider should work with the housing DSP to ensure this aspect of the move is orientated correctly from the start - ensuring schooling areas dovetail with housing budgets and commute times.

## On The Ground

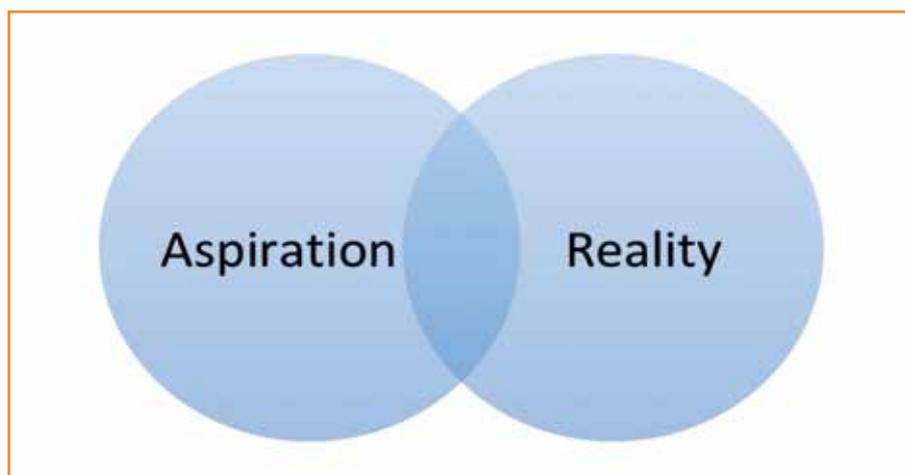
**Curriculum Choice** - Big cities tend to be able to cater for most educational needs. As well as the local system there will often be international, English-language schools as well as other key languages catered for, for example a French Lycee or German Schule.

However, when you move to other locations - and possibly still major locations - options can be more limited. For example, if a family were moving to Birmingham or Manchester in the UK, they would not have access of an American curriculum school, a French language school nor (apart from older children), an International Baccalaureate school.

Therefore, relocations that move outside of major cities (in some countries just outside of the capital) may need to consider schooling types that would not at first be obvious to them.

**School Places** - A key driver. An internet search will often throw up a variety of lovely looking schools, with websites showing manicured sports pitches and up-to-the-minute computer suites filled with Macs.

However, the key factor that can shape options is which of those schools actually have space for the children, and which of those schools would then meet the children's needs profile.



Availability can be a constantly shifting picture - especially in larger cities with greater social mobility - and within the public (state) school system.

Timing can also play a part - with more places generally available at the end of the academic year, though that can differ from country to country (for example December in Australia, July in the UK and March in Japan).

**Red Flag Issues**

There are certain issues that should automatically trigger “red flags” when considering a relocation with children, and where early planning is essential.

**Teenage Children**

As a child grows up through a school the level of teaching naturally becomes more sophisticated and linked to the requirements of that country’s higher education system.

In the younger years, most school systems around the world follow similar aims - developing core literacy and numeracy skill - though some more successfully than others as the PISA chart below illustrates.

Moving between school systems in the primary year groups is relatively straightforward.

As a child grows older - say 12 years and upwards - it becomes harder to switch academic systems. Not only is teaching more sophisticated, but the order in which subjects can be taught - even in universal subjects such as Maths and Science - can vary dramatically between national curriculum.

The demands of national public examinations and the entry requirements of higher education also have a significant impact on this.

Long-term planning is vital at this stage so that families do not find choices limited when looking to apply into universities and colleges.

**Special Educational Needs**

It has been estimated that 20% of children will be have some identifiable special educational support needs during their academic career.

This could vary from mild learning support needs - such as additional reading support - to severe and profound medical requirements.

Families are often moving from a home location, where a child has been diagnosed and a full support programme established, to a new country where the support network is not available.

Schools will try and be helpful, they may not have the support resources or expertise available “in house”.

Furthermore, school board systems have fairly rigorous and bureaucratic assessment processes that can take months to complete.

Families at this stage need detailed information on the requirements of the new destination country - the “nuts and bolts” of the process - and how to build a portfolio on a child to profile their current diagnosis and support programme.

**Language Ability**

If a family is moving to a country that is not native language then some kind of support process will need to be initiated, especially if they are entering the public (state) system.

Most schools can provide language, support - but ages of children again impact on this.

Younger children can pick up language amazingly quickly - both through in-class support and playing with new friends. However, the older a child becomes the harder it is to integrate a non-native speaker into the classroom.

**Top Four Things To Remember**

Be positive. There is always a strong solution if all involved are thinking flexibly and good advice is drawn from.

**Start early** - Even if a move is only mooted, it is worth spending some time in the early stages to map out education requirements. An hour or so invested at this point can save many more further down the relocation process.

**Encourage realism** - Understand and embrace the fact that there are parameters to work within - the structure can actually help in setting sensible goals.

**Focus on the children** - Parents should focus on the needs of their own children and be careful on how they balance their various sources of advice and information.



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Nathaniel has worked across the world in schools and universities and has been in his position for 15 years.

Dean Associates Education has been providing education support for the global mobility sector for over 32 years and has helped over 20,000 families in that time.

We provide cost-effective and flexible solutions for all aspects of education - schooling (state, independent and international), higher education, nurseries, vocational and special educational needs (SEN).

The background to our work has shifted with changes in technology. Whereas once families had very little information to start from, nowadays the internet and social media can bombard them with a cacophony of voices and opinions.

The core ambition, however, remains the same - securing an education solution that fits the needs of that particular family - one that will be stable for the duration of their assignment and provide flexibility for future professional postings.

We provide a personalised service that covers all major destinations around the world.

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