



# Stuart Bayne

## What does value mean for today's modern independent school?

In the current economic climate of uncertainty, the phrase 'value for money' is used increasingly by consumers and our parents are no different. We are supplying a product to them and they want to see a good return for their investment.

The Independent Schools Association states that independent schools "share a desire to meet fully the needs of the young people in their care, treating everyone as individuals and providing a high-quality and personal education. They encourage pupils to make the most of their talents, building confidence through academic achievement and offering a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities."

Parents often share these values as they tour prospective schools, but often their motivation to put their children through a private education may be quite different. Some would like their children to achieve the highest grades possible at relevant examinations in order to secure a particular job beyond university. Others feel that their children will have the best opportunity to meet their business partners of the future by attending independent schools. Parents may also choose schools because they themselves attended a particular establishment and increasingly, parents are escaping the stringent and restrictive education of the state sector; many making huge financial commitments to do so. So with the multitude of driving forces for independent education, what is the correct path for schools such as ours?

Many schools have gone down the route of academic selection as a means to ensure teaching can be conducted to the high levels required for top examination results and these establishments work hard to consistently ensure this is maintained. Other schools are non-selective, but does that mean the quality of education is any worse?

Not at all. Education is tailored to the needs of each individual. Is every school right for every child? Again, no. Some schools are deliberately non-selective and are not driven by grade boundaries, but rather other values intrinsic to independent education, which may include such factors as developing individual talents and interests, teaching children to cooperate and get on with others, being kind and caring, or becoming hard-working members of society.

Ultimately, governors and headteachers would want all of these to be present in their school but most accept that they specialise in particular areas and these are what define their identity



If a parent is dissatisfied with the service they have received, is it therefore not prudent to explore why this is and perhaps point them in the direction of a school that may be better suited to their needs without feeling like we have failed? We simply have a product that did something different to the perception of the consumer. This is no different to preferring a Kindle to an iPad. Until you have tried them, how can you really make an informed decision?

Do the four walls that surround us make a school, or is it so much more? It is about the staff inspiring our youngsters. It is about the vision of the Heads and Governors for the school (what do you want to be?) It is about the sense of community and the feeling that you are all pulling in the same direction. It is about the plethora of experiences offered. But above all, it is about the individual children, helping them to be the best they can be. Don't be driven by league tables if that's not your goal, don't change your ethos because a parent suddenly decides the school is not for them. Continue to provide the unique and the wonderful in whatever form this takes, knowing that your product is indeed 'Value for Money'.

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