

What is education supposed to be?

10 Questions to Ask Yourself

A Guide for Parents Considering a Change

ILIM School
Charlotte, NC



Introduction: The Nagging Question

You picked your child's school carefully. You did the research. You went on the tours. You made the best decision you could with the information you had.

And now something feels off.

Maybe it's subtle. Your child used to love learning, and now they dread homework. They used to be curious, and now they just want to "get it done." They seem stressed in ways that don't match their age.

Or maybe it's more obvious. They're bored. They're anxious. They've been labeled "difficult" or "unfocused" or "not a good fit."

This guide isn't about convincing you to change schools. It's about helping you honestly evaluate whether your child's current environment is serving them - or whether it's time to consider something different.

These are the questions we've found most useful for parents in this situation.

Question 1: Does Your Child Still Love Learning?

Think back to when your child was 3 or 4. Remember how they asked "why" about everything? How they wanted to understand how things worked? How they approached the world with natural curiosity?

Is that still there?

Some loss of novelty is natural. But there's a difference between maturation and extinguishment. If your child has gone from curious to compliant, from eager to exhausted, something important may have been lost.

 **The sign to watch for:** Learning feels like a chore rather than an adventure.

Question 2: How Does Your Child Talk About Failure?

When something is hard, what happens?

Healthy Relationship with Challenge

Children who are developing healthy relationships with challenge see failure as information. "That didn't work. Let me try something else." They're willing to experiment, make mistakes, and learn from them.

Fear of Failure

Children who have been trained to fear failure avoid anything they might not be good at. They give up quickly. They may cry, shut down, or refuse to try. They've learned that mistakes are bad rather than instructive.

📌 **The sign to watch for:** Avoidance of challenge, perfectionism, or excessive distress when things go wrong.

Question 3: Is Your Child Known for Who They Are?

Does your child's teacher understand them as an individual? Not just their academic performance, but their learning style, their interests, their social dynamics, their challenges?

Children thrive when they're seen. When their unique strengths are recognized and their challenges are understood. When they're not just a data point.



Seen as an Individual

Teacher knows learning style, interests, social dynamics, and challenges



Just a Data Point

Primarily defined by test scores or difficulties



The sign to watch for: Feeling like a number, or being primarily defined by their difficulties.

Question 4: What Is Your Child Learning to Value?

Schools teach more than academics. They teach what matters.

If your child's school primarily rewards test scores, your child learns that test scores are what matter. If it primarily rewards compliance, your child learns that following rules is what matters.

What does your child's school reward? Curiosity or correct answers? Collaboration or competition? Genuine understanding or performance?



Curiosity



Collaboration



Understanding



The sign to watch for: Your child has absorbed values that don't match your own.

Question 5: How Diverse Is Your Child's Experience?

The world your child is growing up in is more diverse, more global, and more interconnected than any generation before. Are they being prepared for that world?

This isn't just about demographics. It's about exposure to different ways of thinking, communicating, and seeing the world. It's about learning to navigate across differences.

☐ **The sign to watch for:** Your child's experience is homogeneous - same language, same culture, same perspectives.

Question 6: What Can Your Child Actually DO?

Not what do they know - what can they do?

Can they research a topic independently? Present their findings? Defend their thinking? Collaborate on a project? Solve a problem they haven't seen before?

Knowledge is increasingly commodity. The ability to apply knowledge - to actually do things with it - is what creates value.

☐ **The sign to watch for:** Your child can recite information but struggles to apply it.

Question 7: How Is Stress Showing Up?

Some stress is normal and even healthy. But chronic school-related stress in elementary-age children is a warning sign.

Watch for:

Sleep problems

Stomachaches on school mornings

Anxiety about tests or grades

Perfectionism

Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy

Irritability

☐ **The sign to watch for:** Physical or emotional symptoms that correlate with school.

Question 8: What Are Sundays Like?

This one is simple but revealing. How does your child feel on Sunday evening, knowing Monday is coming?


Some reluctance to leave the weekend is normal. **Dread is not.**

☐ **The sign to watch for:** Sunday anxiety, behavioral changes as the weekend ends, or actively dreading the school week.

Question 9: What Would Your Child Say?

If you asked your child, genuinely and openly, how they feel about school - what would they say?


Children are often remarkably perceptive about their own experience. They know when something isn't working, even if they can't articulate why.

 **The sign to watch for:** Your child tells you, directly or indirectly, that something is wrong.

Question 10: What's Your Gut Telling You?

You know your child better than anyone. You've been watching them since birth. You know when they're thriving and when they're not.

If your gut is telling you something is off, that's worth listening to. Not every instinct is right, but a persistent feeling that your child needs something different is worth exploring.

 **The sign to watch for:** You're reading this guide.

What If You're Seeing These Signs?

01	02	03
Take a breath Recognizing a problem is the first step toward solving it.	Know that it's not too late Children are remarkably resilient. The curiosity that seems extinguished can be rekindled. The love of learning that seems lost can be recovered.	Consider what your child actually needs Not what's prestigious. Not what looks good. What does THIS child, with their unique strengths and challenges, need to thrive?

Some children need more challenge. Some need less pressure. Some need more structure. Some need more freedom. Some need environments where their "differences" are seen as strengths rather than problems.

The Case for Something Different

Switching schools is hard. There's disruption. There's uncertainty. There are friendships to leave behind.

But staying in an environment that's not working is also hard - and the costs compound over time.

If you're considering a change, look for schools that offer something genuinely different - not just the same model with a different name.

Consider environments that prioritize project-based learning over worksheets, real-world skills over test performance, curiosity over compliance. Look for schools where enrichments like STEM, art, music, and practical life skills aren't extras but are woven into the core of daily learning.

And if you want to give your child a capability that most schools don't even attempt - multilingual fluency in Mandarin, Arabic, Spanish, and English - know that the window is still open in elementary school, though it narrows each year. At schools like ILIM, elementary students rotate through two language classrooms each day, building fluency through immersion while developing the problem-solving, presentation, and cultural navigation skills that will serve them for life.

Conclusion: It's Not Them. It Might Be the Environment.

If your child is struggling, the easiest conclusion is that something is wrong with your child.

But what if nothing is wrong with your child? What if the environment just isn't designed for who they are?

A curious child in an environment that rewards compliance will struggle. A creative child in an environment that values standardization will struggle. A kinesthetic learner in an environment designed for auditory learning will struggle.

That doesn't mean something is wrong with them. It means the fit isn't right.

The right environment doesn't just accommodate your child. It celebrates what makes them different. It channels their energy instead of suppressing it. It turns their "difficulties" into strengths.

Ready to Explore Something Different?

ILIM School offers an elementary program (ages 6-12) focused on multilingual fluency, project-based learning, and developing the whole child through STEM, art, music, and practical life skills.

Schedule a private conversation: ilimschool.com/elementary

Questions: contactus@ilimschool.com

Limited seats available