



Settling her son into his new school in Australia turned out to be child's play in the end for expat Vicky Gray



Image: Shutterstock

So we finally had a house, which we had double checked was in the correct catchment for the highly recommended school. And as the hours of my son's first day came ever closer, I felt so nervous for him, that the thought of it made my stomach knot up.

This was the moment I had been dreading. I had been waking up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night for months, ever since I took him away from his delightful little friends, in his happy little school, where he merrily trotted in every day lunchbox a-swinging.

He was now going to be suddenly abandoned in an enormous institution, with five times the amount of pupils, all speaking a language that resembled English but had weird undertones and different phrases. How on earth was my shy, timid little lad going to cope?

Of course my fears were totally irrational and this had only been brought on because at the age of 13, I had moved from Merseyside to Essex with my parents, where my father had been given a promotion. At the age of 13, you are not rational or reasonable, and the last thing you want to do is leave your friends. To say I took it badly was an understatement. I was filled with rage. I hated school and only went to registration – then I

## School daze

would convert other students to bunk off with me behind garages and smoke cigarettes.

It's only now, as a parent myself, that I realise the horror of what I put my dear parents through, and so you can see why I had such a hang-up about moving my son from his former school.

As it happened, he fitted in perfectly. Being only nine years old, he hadn't got to the stage where he was 'hanging out' with friends after school in England. So he quickly made hoards of new friends and most of them hailed from other countries themselves.

The relief was unbounded for me. I felt like a suitcase of bricks had been removed from my shoulders. My first impression at my son's school was how confident the children seemed to be, even at a young age. I know many of the children in his previous school in England would be quite shy if an adult were to approach them. But I found almost all the children to be very forward, even to the point of being cheeky.

So being a little concerned about this, I decided it would be a good idea, once my son had started the school to 'help' in the classroom

**Above** The first day of school for your child – especially in a new country – can be just as stressful for the parent!

and check out how they behaved during class lessons. This little escapade put my mind at rest, and although maybe the kids were still a little on the cheeky side, they were also very polite, extremely helpful and exuded confidence beyond their years.

When you are searching for a good school to send your children to, you may be shocked to find that there is no OFSTED results table, and as we have always thought that the best way to judge a school, it does become a little more difficult. Australia has a system known as NAPLAN (National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy). The NAPLAN tests are for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9, and they are taken nationally throughout Australia. The results of the test will be on your child's school report which you will receive in September.

You can also find out the overall results for the school, by logging onto its website. Checking out a school on the web is a good idea and can offer a glimpse of the school curriculum and outline how it is run. But the best advice is to go to your chosen school and check it out in person. 🇦🇺

■ This extract is taken from *Didgeridoos & Didgeridon'ts – A Brit's guide to moving your life Down Under* by Vicky Gray, priced £14.97 and available from Amazon.

