

Parents, do your homework before choosing an online school

Parents and guardians considering online schooling for their children must ensure they properly vet the ability of a school to provide an holistic, meaningful educational experience coupled with excellent academic and emotional support, an education expert says.



Colin Northmore

“There are a number of online schooling options on the market, and this offering has grown further as a result of Covid-19 and lockdowns,” says Colin Northmore, Principal of Evolve Online School, a brand of private education provider, ADvTech.

“But just as parents would do their homework before enrolling their child at a contact education institution, they should also ask the right questions before deciding on an online learning institution,” he says.

Northmore notes that many parents can attest to the frustrations experienced with online learning during lockdown, where the quality of offerings differed markedly.

“Parents will by now have figured out that what their school offered was more or maybe less effective than what their friends’ children were getting, and clearly not all online delivery models are created equal. So, a first step before deciding on an online school, would be to enquire how efficiently current students of those schools who had to move from contact to online were able to continue their educational journey during lockdown,” he says.

“Online schools have clearly differentiated offerings, and parents should take care to interrogate and clarify a school’s offering before enrolling, and in particular ensure that the curriculum is more than just ‘paper behind glass’,” he says.

Northmore says that an online school focused on developing the whole child while ensuring that academic excellence is maintained, must incorporate the following:

- Diagnostic testing to determine the exact level of proficiency of a student before placement, and during the educational journey;
- Asynchronous learning so that learners can move through content at their own pace and according to their own proficiency, with direct access to teachers who will facilitate extra activation classes;
- Synchronous learning where students will also be able to attend live interactive classes, and
- Socialisation opportunities with academies, studios and day camps so that students can mingle with their peers and balance their screen time with green time.

He says Evolve Online School has weekly webinars to allow parents to get a feel for the school’s offering, as well as ask the questions they need answered before enrolling.

“It is highly recommended that parents attend such virtual events at any school they are considering for their child,” he says.

Northmore adds that parents should ensure that substantial support is available for students and parents, because online schooling can be a very lonely and frustrating experience if such support is not available, particularly if an online school is merely copying and pasting physical classes into a virtual space.

“Schools must have life coaches or the equivalent, who can help develop crucial 21st Century Skills and global competencies, in addition to the regular curriculum,” he says, “and each student’s learning experience must be tailored to their specific needs, so that they are encouraged to grow at a pace that suits their ability and enthusiasm.”

It is not enough for an online school to simply focus on delivering a curriculum, he says.

“For a rewarding and successful online schooling experience, there should be a strong focus on all skills – foundational, social and emotional. Our children are growing up in a world very different from the one in which we grew up. Things that we, as adults, deal with and take in our stride they are already facing at a very young age. Therefore online schools should offer substantial support to help teach students how to deal with issues such as stress and anxiety, while helping them develop important coping mechanisms, resilience and a growth mindset,” he says.

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