



Mystery Shopping your School



Key considerations for mystery shopping your school

1. Why mystery shop?

There are usually two key reasons as to why schools conduct a mystery shop of their admissions process. The first is to enable the school to gain external evidence to support their plans, for example, an external voice reporting back that the waiting room was shabby or it was difficult to book a visit. This external impartial evidence can provide the catalyst to change. The other reason is best practice. All areas of a school are constantly evaluated, from the quality of teaching, standard of food, appearance of the grounds and so on. Evaluating the prospective parent experience internally is practically impossible as it is not an authentic situation. Equally gaining feedback from non-joiner families is very difficult, the best way to gain independent impartial insight is via a mystery shop.

2. Who to tell about the shop?

Often schools choose to keep the fact the school is being mystery shopped a secret. This can be to relieve stress on those who may worry if they know such a process is happening and to stop them guessing who the visitor is. However telling your staff that you are having a mystery shop can be beneficial. It is a strong signal to all staff that the school tour process is important, and thus promotes the concept that recruitment of pupils is important to the school and at the heart of its success. A great way to start building a marketing and recruitment culture amongst staff.

3. What parent profile should the mystery shopper have?

It is important that the profile of the mystery shopper fits that of the school. As this is a review of the actual admissions process, the mystery shopper must fit a demographic of parents that you are already successfully bringing into the building. If you are receiving no enquiries of a certain type of target family the work needs to be done on marketing your school to get them through the door. The first step is attracting them, the second is converting them on the visits.

4. What should a mystery shop of a school cover?

The mystery shopper should mirror the behaviour of a typical parent. The shop should therefore cover typical parental research, e.g. looking on social media, the school website and searching via google. It should also include details of the booking process for a tour, in order that this can be evaluated. The tour process itself needs to be looking at key areas such as: Who the parent meets, How personalised it is to their requirements, How long it takes, rating of the facilities and overall impression. Monitoring any follow up after the tour also needs to be part of the process.

See overleaf for further details on the five step process to mystery shopping your school.



Mystery Shopping your School

The five step process to evaluating your prospective parent experience

1. The exploratory call

This call takes place between the school and one of our team who will oversee your mystery shop. All our team have experience as SLT members of Independent Schools. They will work with you to understand your reasoning for the mystery shop, whether it is to evidence certain elements, or as best practice. Together we will build a parent profile of the mystery shopper best suited for your needs as a school and ensure we have all the information to source a suitable authentic mystery shopper.

2. The pre-visit research

Research will be carried out in the same way a prospective parent would do so. We will look at all social media channels, how easy it is to find your school from Google and also your website. We can also search on specific terms if you wish. This will form part of the report, giving you an understanding of how your social media channels are positioning themselves to parents. It will also throw up any spurious links or accounts that appear to be associated with the school.

3. Booking the visit

The visit will be booked as agreed with you, either by phone, email or internet and within an agreed timescale. Detailed notes will be given along with copies of all correspondence about how the query was handled, what pre information was given and what information the school requested from us. We will look at key areas such as friendliness, flexibility of visit times, ease of reaching the correct person.

4. The school site visit

The visit will look at areas as agreed with yourself, and can include specific questions should you wish. We will feedback on key areas such as first impressions, length of tour, who we met, overall impression of the school, views on the facilities shown, perceived strengths and weaknesses of the school. We will also monitor any follow up correspondence for a month after the visit and provide details and copies of it.

5. Reporting back

We will provide you with a written report, outlining all of the above so that you can discuss with your team. You will also benefit from a phone call or zoom meeting with one of our team to talk through the findings, answer any queries, and give informal suggestions as to how you might make improvements based on our findings, almost always these include some very small changes which can have a strong positive impact.

See overleaf for further details



About the ISP

The ISP was founded in 2015 to offer high quality CPD to all independent schools, in particular we wanted to make CPD affordable and accessible to those in small schools with budget restraints. We have held hundreds of successful sessions and are in the process of gaining accreditation from the College of Chartered teaching. Recently our team has expanded and now offers consultancy services and in-house training.

Who are your mystery shoppers?

Our mystery shoppers are all individuals who have children of school age, and in the case of Independent School mystery shops have either either attended an Independent School themselves or have children currently in one. They are individually briefed for each assignment and are there to give a genuine view as a prospective parent, rather than that of a marketing consultant.

How do I book a mystery shop?

You can either sign up on our website **www.independentschools.org** or send an email to **alicia@independentschoolsportal.org** or call **07929925971** We aim to book all shops within a month, however we pride ourselves on matching you with the most suitable shopper so it can sometimes take longer.

How much does it cost?

Our mystery shop costs **£595** for one phase of the school, if we are looking at two phases (eg. Prep and Senior or Nursery and Prep) it is an extra **£200** assuming the shops can be done on the same day. If you have a group of schools we will work with you to look at the most cost-effective solution. If you have very specific requirements please do give us a call as this information sheet tells you about our standard mystery shop. We can tailor it to your needs should you have other areas that you are keen to look at so please give us a call. Equally we can provide feedback via presentation, together with suggested next steps, please contact us for further details and prices.

Do you mystery shop state schools as well as Independent Schools?

Yes. Whilst we have more demand for the Independent Sector, we are starting to see an increase in requests from the State Sector. We can, with enough notice, also arrange to mystery shop an Open Evening or Open Day. Prices for this are available on application - please do get in touch to discuss in more detail.