

Questions Every Parent Should Ask Before Enrolling Their Child at AELO Swiss Academy

There is a particular kind of quiet that settles over parents during a school tour. You walk through bright corridors, someone hands you a folder with a well-designed cover, and every question you prepared in the car somehow feels too blunt to ask out loud. I have sat in that quiet myself, more than once, and I have watched other parents disappear into it too. The schools that impressed me most were never the ones with the best brochures. They were the ones that answered the awkward questions without flinching.

If you are considering AELO Swiss Academy for your child, I want to be clear about what this piece is and is not. It is not a review. I cannot tell you whether the school is right for your family, and anyone who claims to know that from the outside is guessing. What I can offer is the set of questions that experience has taught me to ask, the ones that tend to separate a school that is genuinely working from a school that is merely well presented. Bring them with you. Ask them politely, and ask all of them.

Start with the curriculum, and follow it to the end

The first question sounds obvious, and most parents ask a version of it: what does the school teach? The better version is longer. What does AELO Swiss Academy teach, through which ages, and what qualification does a child leave with at the end?

A school can sound thoroughly international without offering a clear pathway. Many international schools in Switzerland teach the International Baccalaureate, some follow a curriculum leading toward the Swiss Matura, others run British or American programs, and a few blend several approaches. Each route has real consequences. The Matura opens Swiss universities directly but demands strong local language skills. The IB Diploma is recognized widely but is demanding in its final two years. A blend can work beautifully, or it can leave a child without a clean qualification if the school has not thought the sequencing through. Ask which of these describes the school, and ask what happens at the transition ages, around eleven and around sixteen, when programs often change shape.

Then ask about oversight. If the school claims IB authorization, ask which programs are authorized and which are pending. If it cites accreditation, ask which body, when the last full visit took place, and whether you can read the report. A school that has been through external scrutiny and come out intact will usually hand over the paperwork without hesitating.

Finally, ask about outcomes over time. Request the destinations or results for the last three to five years, not the most recent year. A single strong year can mean a small cohort of unusually able students. A pattern across several years means something.

Ask who will actually teach your child

Schools sell themselves on their head, their facilities, and their philosophy. Your child will experience none of those things daily. Your child will experience a teacher.

So ask about turnover. International schools everywhere live with staff moving on, and some movement is healthy, but ask directly: how long does the average teacher stay, and how many are new this September? A school where most of the staff arrived within the last two years is a school still finding itself, whatever its brochure

says. Ask about qualifications too, and whether teachers are trained in the specific curriculum they deliver. Enthusiasm matters, but a teacher new to the IB or to the Swiss system needs support while they learn it, and you want to know the school provides that support rather than pretending the need does not exist.

The most revealing request you can make is to meet the teacher your child would actually have. Not the head of primary, not the admissions director. The person in the room. How the school responds to this request tells you a great deal. Some arrange it within the week. Some deflect with impressive-sounding policies about safeguarding the timetable. There are legitimate reasons a meeting cannot happen on the day of your visit, but there is no legitimate reason it cannot happen at all.

The language question deserves more than a pamphlet answer

Switzerland has four national languages, and the international school market here serves families from everywhere. That makes the language question more complicated than it would be almost anywhere else, and it deserves precise answers rather than warm generalities.

Ask what the language of instruction is at each stage, and then ask what happens if your child does not yet have it. Most schools offer some form of support for children arriving without the main language, but the details vary enormously: how many hours per week, in what setting, for how many terms, delivered by whom, and at what additional cost. Get numbers. A school that says children "pick it up quickly" is either very lucky or not looking closely.

Ask, too, how seriously the local language is taught. Some international schools treat German or French as a core subject with real progression, others as a weekly gesture. Neither approach is wrong, but you should know which you are buying. If you expect to stay in Switzerland for years, the local language will shape your child's friendships, your family's daily life, and eventually their options. If you expect to move again within a couple of years, the calculus shifts toward English and transferable qualifications. Both are reasonable positions. What is unreasonable is discovering the school's position only after enrolling.

Class size, and the numbers behind the numbers

Ask for class sizes, and then keep asking. An average of eighteen can conceal a school https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advices/ where one year group has twelve children and another has twenty-six. Ask for the actual number in your child's year group, and the largest class currently running in the school. Ask whether classes are mixed by age anywhere, and why. Ask how many adults are in the room, including assistants, and what the assistant is actually there to do.

Then ask the forward-looking version. What happens if the year group grows by four children in January? Is there a cap, and who enforces it? A school with a firm cap it can quote is a school that has decided to protect something. A school that says it depends on circumstances is telling you that circumstances will decide.

What an ordinary day actually looks like

Ask for a sample timetable for your child's year group. This one document answers a dozen questions at once. You will see how much time goes to core subjects, whether art and music are timetabled or squeezed, how much movement there is in the day, and how the week is balanced. You will also see the gap between the brochure and reality, and that gap is where the truth about a school lives.

Ask about the texture of the day beyond lessons. When are the breaks, and are they long enough for children to actually play? Who provides lunch, what is served, and how are dietary needs handled? What are the hours of

after-school care, what does it cost, and what do children actually do there? What is the homework expectation in your child's grade, and what is the policy on screens and devices? None of these questions is sophisticated, and that is precisely the point. A school that answers them easily is a school that runs on more than marketing.

Money: the full picture, not the headline number

Few international schools anywhere are inexpensive, and tuition in this part of the world rarely tells the whole story. Before you commit to AELO Swiss Academy, ask for a complete picture of what a family like yours paid last year.

The extras add up quietly. There is often a registration fee, an enrollment deposit, and a re-enrollment fee each year. Ask whether the deposit is refundable and under what conditions. Ask about the withdrawal notice period, because many schools require a full term's notice, and leaving without it can mean owing fees for months your child will not attend. Lunches, transport, technology, exam fees, and residential trips all sit outside tuition, and some trips are presented as optional while being, in practice, expected. Ask which costs are genuinely optional and which are not. Ask about sibling discounts and whether payment plans exist. Then ask the question that summarizes all the others: what did the total bill look like for a family with children in our year groups?

A school that answers this quickly has been asked it before and respects it. A school that seems offended by it has told you something about the years ahead.

Support for when things wobble

Every child struggles at some point. The new child who cannot sleep on Sunday nights, the reader who falls behind after a move, the eleven-year-old who cannot find a place at lunch. What separates schools is not whether these moments happen but what the adults do next.

Ask what the school does in the first six weeks when a new child is visibly unhappy or slipping academically. Ask about learning support: is it included in fees, is it charged separately, is there a waiting list, is there a cap on hours. Ask who the counselor is, how children reach them, and whether parents can raise a concern without triggering a formal process. Then ask the question that cuts deepest: can you describe a child who struggled here, and what the school actually did?

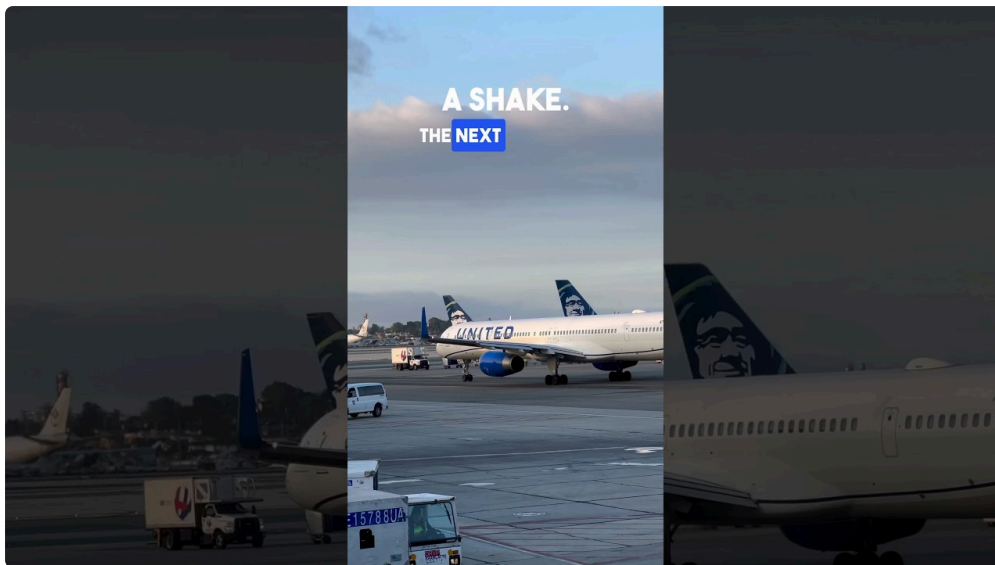


A good school will answer with a story, possibly an imperfect one, because real help is rarely tidy. A vague answer about pastoral care and wellbeing is a warning sign, politely delivered.

What the admissions process tells you

Ask whether the school is selective or inclusive, and listen carefully, because the answer shapes everything else. If there is an assessment, ask what it involves, who administers and reads it, and what it costs. If the school suggests your child needs additional support as a condition of entry, ask who makes that judgment and on what evidence. A school that requires support should be a school that provides it well, and you are entitled to check that the two halves match.

Ask about waitlists and how they operate, including whether siblings receive priority. The mechanics of a waitlist reveal a school's values more honestly than its mission statement ever will.



The community you would be joining

Ask about the families. How many nationalities are represented, roughly what proportion are local Swiss families, and how many stay for the whole journey rather than the typical two or three year posting? None of these answers is right or wrong, but the mix determines the friendships your child forms and the parent community you will live inside. A school where everyone leaves every three years is a school of hellos and goodbyes, and some families find that exhausting while others find it energizing.

Ask how the school communicates with parents and how quickly a normal email gets a normal answer. Ask whether parents are welcome in the building and whether a parent association exists with any real role. Then notice the parents at pickup if you can, because they are the community, and you will be standing among them twice a day for years.

Where the road leads out

Ask where last year's leavers went. A school confident in its outcomes will show you the list without being asked twice. If your child is older, ask about university counseling: who does it, when it starts, and how many hours each student receives. If your family might relocate again, ask how records, references, and mid-year transitions are handled, because some schools manage this gracefully and others make you feel like an inconvenience.

And ask the question most parents avoid: what happens if it does not work out? Can a family leave mid-year, what is owed, and does the school help a struggling child find a better fit elsewhere? A school that bristles at this question has told you something. A school that answers it plainly has told you something far more reassuring.

Five questions worth writing down

You will not remember everything above while standing in a corridor with a folder in your hand. If you only bring five questions to your visit to AELO Swiss Academy, make them these.

- What qualification will my child leave with, and what have leavers from the last five years gone on to do?
- Who exactly will teach my child in September, how long have they been at the school, and can we meet them?
- What is the largest class running in the school right now, and what is the actual number for my child's year group?
- What did the complete annual cost look like for a family like ours, including everything outside tuition?
- Can you describe a specific child who struggled here and walk me through what the school did?

Any school that answers all five without discomfort has passed a test most schools never face.

Trust your own read

Your child's reaction to a school matters, but weigh it carefully. Children fall in love with swimming pools, climbing walls, and the one teacher who crouched to their height. Novelty does that. The decision is yours, and it should rest on the steadier evidence: how the adults talk about children when they think you are not listening, whether the work on the walls is current or three years old, whether the tour route felt scripted or whether you were allowed to wander, and how the school treats you across the weeks of emails that follow the visit.

The signal worth waiting for is a calm one. It is the quiet relief of watching a school answer a hard question honestly, even when the honest answer is not flattering. If you can imagine yourself raising a difficult concern eight months from now and being glad you did, you have probably found the right place. If you already know you would hesitate, keep looking. The folder will not tell you. The questions will.