



FOR FAMILIES MOVING TO THE CENTRAL ISLAND

Schools and Raising a Family

2026 EDITION

Catchments, choices, and the small stuff, so you land in the right school the first time.

WELCOME

First, where will they go?

We're Travis and Kiel Bach, and when families plan a move here, schools come up before almost anything else. The thing most people don't realize until they're deep in it: on the Island your school is set by your home's catchment. Where you buy and where your kids go are the same decision.

So this lays out the whole picture, the public districts, French immersion and specialized programs, the private schools, daycare, extra support, and life outside the classroom. It is a starting point, not advice, so confirm the current details. That link between the street and the school is exactly where we come in.

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

- ✓ How catchments work, and how to land in the school you actually want.
- ✓ Public and private options, French immersion, and specialized programs.
- ✓ Daycare, extra support, and the registration steps when you arrive.

YOUR ISLAND TEAM



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THE ONE THAT MATTERS MOST

Where you buy is where they learn

This is the piece nobody spells out, and the reason families work with us early. Here is how school placement actually works here.

Your address is your school. Public placement is by the catchment area you live in. That's why we treat the home and the school as one decision, not two.

Register early. Many schools are at or near capacity. Kindergarten is for children turning five by December 31, and popular schools fill fast, so get in as soon as you can.

Out of catchment is possible, not promised. You can request a different school, but it depends on space. Requests open in January, close at the end of March, and are decided by late April, with no guarantee.

New to the Island. Register through the district's central office as soon as you have an address, with proof of address, your child's records, and immunization history.

WHERE WE COME IN

Tell us the school or the program you want, and we'll point you to the neighbourhoods that feed it, so you buy into the right catchment the first time instead of moving twice. It is the most useful thing we do for families, and almost no one else maps it.

THE PUBLIC SYSTEM

Four districts, one island

Four public school districts cover the central Island. All run kindergarten through Grade 12, with schools that often back onto ocean, forest, or farmland.

Nanaimo Ladysmith (SD68) **the hub**

The big one: roughly 15,000 students across about 27 elementary and 6 secondary schools in 26 catchment areas, with French immersion, secondary academies, and a distance-learning option.

Qualicum (SD69) **Parksville and Qualicum**

A smaller, well-regarded district serving Parksville, Qualicum Beach, and up to Bowser, with a relaxed, beach-town feel.

Cowichan Valley (SD79) **Duncan and the south**

Schools across Duncan, Mill Bay, Shawnigan, and Lake Cowichan, in one of the Island's faster-growing areas.

Pacific Rim (SD70) **Port Alberni and the coast**

The west-coast district, covering Port Alberni out to Tofino and Ucluelet.

JUDGING A SCHOOL

Published rankings are one lens, not the whole story. Weigh fit, programs, class size, and the feel of the place, and know that Island schools have strong Indigenous-education partnerships. We're glad to tell you the honest word on the ground.

PROGRAMS AND CHOICES

French immersion and specialized streams

Beyond your catchment school, there are programs worth knowing about, several with their own timelines and waitlists.

French immersion. Early immersion starts in Kindergarten or Grade 1 and is assigned by lottery, with results in mid-February. Late immersion begins in Grade 6 at Ecole Quarterway, and students can graduate with a Dual Dogwood diploma in both languages. Spaces are limited, so apply early.

Francophone schooling. For first-language French families, the provincial Conseil scolaire francophone runs its own school, separate from immersion.

Secondary academies. From Grade 8, students can apply to focused academies in hockey, soccer, and the performing arts.

IB, trades, and distance learning. International Baccalaureate is offered at a couple of schools, there are trades and dual-credit pathways with the university, and Island ConnectED provides distance learning from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

The private options

If you'd prefer an independent school, the central Island has a real range, faith-based, Montessori, and university-prep.

Aspengrove School **Lantzville · IB**

An independent, non-denominational, co-ed school from junior kindergarten to Grade 12, and the area's International Baccalaureate World School. About 310 students on a 40-acre campus, with tuition around \$39,000 a year and bursaries available.

Nanaimo Christian School **Nanaimo · faith-based**

A combined elementary, middle, and high school rooted in a Christian faith tradition, serving Nanaimo families since 1977.

Discover Montessori and VIU **Nanaimo**

Discover Montessori School offers the Montessori method in the early grades, and The High School at VIU is an IB option on the university campus. Several Montessori preschools round out the early years.

FURTHER AFIELD, AND BOARDING

In the Cowichan and south, families also look at Queen Margaret's School in Duncan (day and boarding, with an equestrian option), the boarding campuses Brentwood College and Shawnigan Lake School, Sunrise Waldorf, and Catholic schools. Ask each about tuition, waitlists, financial aid, and busing.

THE EARLY YEARS

Daycare and preschool

If your kids are little, this is often the hardest part of the move, and the part people wish they'd started sooner.

Get on lists early. Licensed daycare is in demand and waitlists are real. It is worth getting on lists the moment you know you're coming, sometimes before you've even chosen a home.

The cost help. British Columbia's \$10-a-day ChildCareBC spaces and the income-based Child Care Subsidy can bring costs down meaningfully. Nanaimo alone has well over a hundred licensed facilities to work through.

Free and drop-in options. StrongStart centres at many elementary schools offer free, drop-in early-learning for children under five, a lovely way to meet other families before school even starts.

Before and after school. Most areas have before- and after-school care, but it books up, so line it up alongside your school registration.

WHEN A CHILD NEEDS MORE

Extra support and assessments

Every district provides learning support, and this is one area where knowing the local lay of the land really helps.

Support at school. Schools offer learning assistance, inclusion support, and individual education plans (IEPs). Talk to the school early so a plan is in place from the start.

The assessment bottleneck. An IEP is written by the school, but it often rests on a psychoeducational assessment, and the wait for one through the district can be long. Many families choose a private assessment for faster results, which the school can then use to put support in place.

Going private. Campbell and Fairweather Psychology Group in Nanaimo is one of the main local options for private psychoeducational assessments, a thorough process run by a team of psychologists. Extended health benefits may cover part of the cost, and disability tax credits can help offset the rest.

Other supports. Private occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, and tutoring fill gaps, and there is support for gifted learners and for English-language learners too.

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Life outside school, and what's next

Half of raising a family here happens outside school hours, and it's a big part of why people move.

Sports and the outdoors. Hockey, soccer, swimming, and sailing all have strong local clubs, and the rec centres and pools are busy year-round. Add beaches, lakes, biking, and skiing at Mount Washington up by Comox, and kids are rarely short of something to do.

Arts and community. Music, dance, and theatre programs, well-loved libraries, summer camps, and the usual Scouts and Guides give kids plenty of ways to land and make friends fast.

AND AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo offers degrees, trades, and university-transfer programs, plus dual-credit courses high-schoolers can start early. From there, transferring to Victoria or the mainland is straightforward, so families thinking long-term have real options close to home.

THE MOVE

Getting set up, step by step

- ✓ Pick your top schools or programs, and we'll show you which neighbourhoods feed them.
- ✓ Register through the district's central office as soon as you have an address.
- ✓ Gather records: birth certificate, proof of address, immunization history, and transcripts.
- ✓ For French immersion or a popular school, apply early; immersion is a lottery.
- ✓ Sort daycare or before- and after-school care well ahead, the waitlists are long.
- ✓ If your child may need support, line up an assessment early, privately if the district wait is long.
- ✓ Get the kids into a team or a club; it's the fastest way to make a new place feel like home.

SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

The main options, side by side

A quick reference to the public districts and the better-known independent schools. Confirm current grades, programs, and tuition directly with each.

SCHOOL / DISTRICT	TYPE	GRADES	AREA
PUBLIC			
Nanaimo Ladysmith (SD68)	Public	K-12	Nanaimo, Ladysmith
Qualicum (SD69)	Public	K-12	Parksville, Qualicum
Cowichan Valley (SD79)	Public	K-12	Duncan, Mill Bay
Pacific Rim (SD70)	Public	K-12	Port Alberni
French Immersion (SD68)	Public program	K-12	Nanaimo
INDEPENDENT			
Aspengrove School	Independent, IB	JrK-12	Lantzville
Nanaimo Christian School	Independent, faith	K-12	Nanaimo
Discover Montessori	Independent	Early years	Nanaimo
The High School at VIU	Independent, IB	Secondary	Nanaimo
Queen Margaret's School	Day and boarding	PreK-12	Duncan
Brentwood / Shawnigan Lake	Boarding	Secondary	Mill Bay, Shawnigan

Programs, grades, and tuition change; always confirm the current details with the school or district.

HOW WE HELP

The street and the school

Because your address sets your school, the smartest thing a family can do is choose the neighbourhood and the school together. That's our specialty: tell us the schools or programs that matter to you, and we'll steer you to the right catchments, and to the local people who make settling in easy. We're guides first, and always glad to give you the honest word on a school or an area.

TALK IT THROUGH WITH US



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Book a 20-minute call, or explore listings and neighbourhood guides at bachrealestate.ca

PLEASE NOTE

This guide is a general overview to help you plan, not educational, financial, or legal advice. Catchments, programs, waitlists, and tuition are current at the time of writing and they change, so please confirm the latest with the school district, the individual schools, and gov.bc.ca before you act.

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