

Guest Blogger Jenny: A “Nurturing” Environment: Does Mirman School Deliver?

Description



Mirman School (Photo: Google Images)

The word “nurture” means to nourish or feed, either in the form of food and sustenance or skills and education. By that definition, any Los Angeles private school has a “nurturing” environment. Each educates children every day, and most even gives them a balanced lunch, too.

But, (sigh) “nurturing” has taken on a much more involved and expanded definition according to our crop of private school helicopter parents. Apparently, “nurturing” also means listening to and respecting everything the child says or desires, not letting them ever feel bad for even a moment about themselves (this includes bad grades that they earned), praising everything they do (no matter how mediocre it might be), and just generally kowtowing to the so-called “self esteem” movement (a movement which actually has produced kids with *lower* self esteem, but don’t get me started on that rant).

Thus, when parents are looking at private schools, they might be looking for the most “nurturing” environment, a place where their child is accepted for who she is in everything she does (even if she turns out to be disruptive, disrespectful, and refuses to eat her broccoli). Some schools do better at presenting the “nurturing” image better than others; [The Willows School](#), for example, has a sterling reputation in this regard. In some ways, these schools appear to be nurturing the parents’s

needs, not the children's.

Well, my child doesn't go to The Willows. My child goes to Mirman, a school with an air of mystery. What do they do there? I've heard it called (from rather clueless sources) everything from elitist (any private school earns this adjective in an instant) to "the Nazi school" (obviously listening to Rush Limbaugh instead of reading the brochure). So what's the story? Is Mirman "nurturing"?

My daughter didn't enter Mirman until 4th grade. She was understandably nervous about going to a new school with kids who'd mostly been there since Room 1 (there is no kindergarten). She was also uptight about the academic expectations; Mirman is a school for "highly gifted" students, and Anna came from public school. She worried about having to play catch up.

From the first day, Anna settled in quickly. Her teacher, a real pro, was kind to her while still expecting excellent work. Anna's emotional comfort was greatly considered; nasty girl politics were shut down. Friends were made. Lunches were eaten. All in all, it was the easiest school transition Anna has ever had. Sure, she was the "new girl" for the first year. But that's life.

If you define "nurturing" as educating, I honestly can't think of a school that does a better job. The kinds of assignments they're given are pretty extraordinary. Mirman teaches the kids to work in small groups, and encourages them to analyze their group's dynamic in order to improve performance. Honest self-evaluation is a valuable skill, and Anna learned it early. From self-analysis comes improvement, and that's a true self-esteem booster.

Is the school squishy and warm and full of free time? Well, no it's not. Mirman students are smart and wily; they're a tough room. Mirman teachers are hyper organized and structured, because highly gifted children need to keep their brains occupied at all times. Those kids are stimulated all day long with constant knowledge and problem solving. They're encouraged to have good manners (my daughter's manners skyrocketed) and be able to make good conversation. They're also expected to manage their own time, be responsible for their own work, remember the school's honor code, and use their school distributed laptops according to the school's ultra strict use agreement they signed.

Does that mean there's no jokes or hugs? Of course not! Students get plenty of positive feedback, when it's merited. The students are still treated like children, not like adults. Anna has had great, funny, respectful relationships with her teachers. This respect is reflected in the way the students treat one another; I've seen no substantive bullying or mean girl behavior there.

I think Mirman nurtures students in the best, purest possible way. The education is incredible, the social skills invaluable, the campus itself a lovely little oasis where the nerdy kids can be themselves. Whatâ€™s more nurturing than that?

You know whom they donâ€™t nurture? The parents! Seriously, the school just wants parents to drop the kids off, pay the tuition, help out when asked, and otherwise vaporize. And Iâ€™m totally fine with that, because my daughter gets exactly what she needs to thrive.

Jenny Heitz Schulte has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School in 2010. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published in the Daily News and on Mamapedia, The Well Mom, Hybrid Mom and A Child Grows In Brooklyn. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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