

What I Did (and Did Not) Expect About Mirman School by Jenny Heitz (re-post)

Description

Today is Throwback Thursday (TBT) in social media. So, I'm posting this piece by Jenny Heitz from the archives. It's not often you get an insider's look at a school like Mirman. —Christina

Mirman is one of those schools that has a certain mystique surrounding it. Because it accepts only highly gifted children, there are people who refer to it as “the freak school,” “the geek school,” or, in one stunning instance, “the Hitler school” (I have no idea what that means). While I took all these nicknames with a grain of salt, I had some apprehension about sending my daughter Anna there. I felt it was probably the right place for her, but I was worried that it would be too serious, too high powered, and, frankly, too dorky.

Happily, none of these fears manifested into reality.

Here's What Surprised Me:

- *The kids are not weird.* Well, ok, there might be a few little boys running around speaking in monotone voices, but they are few and far between. One of the interesting things about Mirman students is how normal they actually are. They may be super smart kids, but they're still kids, and they act like kids. The only difference is that the level of carpool conversation is suddenly elevated.
- *The parents are far nicer than I expected.* I was worried that the parents would be way too into their super gifted children. But what I've found is that most of the parents seem sort of puzzled and bemused to have these kids. The parent body is, for the most part, very smart, very educated, a bit shy, and really not snobby in the least. The “not snobby” factor makes dealing with Mirman parents a pleasure, especially on field trips. As far as I know, there are no celebrities at Mirman. Interesting. You can draw your own conclusions about that.
- *The workload isn't nearly as heavy as I thought it would be.* Naturally, I'd heard horror stories about Mirman kids working constantly, even during carpool, and how “unnatural” the whole thing was. That turned out to be nonsense. Anna definitely has homework, and it's

homework she has to schedule for herself during the week. Itâ€™s made her into quite the little time management pro. And while the school works the kids really hard during the school day, Anna actually seems to spend less of her time at home doing homework than some of her public school friends. I would not say that she is overworked on any level.

- *Parents are not treated like royalty.* Unlike some private schools, where wealthy parents get the kid glove treatment, Mirman generally treats the parents like idiots. Iâ€™m not kidding. Iâ€™ve even brought up this fact to other Mirman parents and they crack up as they agree. All the schoolâ€™s emphasis and efforts involve the kids; it is the most kid focused school Iâ€™ve encountered. While Mirman wants parents to give money and be on committees and be involved, it will not brownnose you when you enter the front office. If youâ€™re looking for adulation, seek it elsewhere.
- *The commute isnâ€™t as bad as I thought it would be.* Commuting from Hollywood to Mirman seemed like a nightmare at first, but itâ€™s turned out to be ok. Itâ€™s made ok only by the fact that Iâ€™m in a carpool that Iâ€™ll defend with my life. At the moment, weâ€™re trying to get together enough kids on this side of town to justify a bus. I dream about the bus, and someday my dream will be made a reality.
- *My child is even happier at Mirman than I ever imagined.* I had a feeling that Mirman was the right place for Anna, but her transformation over her first year there has been extraordinary. She came in at fourth grade, at a distinct academic disadvantage, and has still managed to get really good grades. It has focused her competitive instincts, but also emphasized good citizenship and kindness. Her self-confidence in terms of public speaking has skyrocketed. Sheâ€™s making new friends. All in all, sheâ€™s a different child now, and I really credit Mirman with all the positive changes.
- *The kids are so nice.* Really, theyâ€™re nice. The bullying problems that seem so prevalent at other schools are far less at Mirman. If thereâ€™s a problem, it gets handled. And one of the advantages of putting together so many highly gifted kids, who were so often the butts of jokes, is that theyâ€™re generally kind to one another. These kids have empathy for one another. While Anna has had some girl politics moments, they have been mild and easily handled.
- *Itâ€™s more diverse than I thought.* The reality about private school is that it will never be as diverse as public school. So, while Mirman doesnâ€™t resemble a microcosm of Los Angeles, diversity wise, itâ€™s still better than I anticipated. And because all the kids share the trait of high intelligence (thatâ€™s the main criterion for entrance to Mirman), this seems to be what draws them together, not race. My daughter heard plenty of racial slurs at her old public school, but hasnâ€™t heard one thing at Mirman. Good.

As Anna's first year at Mirman draws to a close, I'm delighted with the school. It has exceeded every expectation I had for it, and my child is having a wonderful educational experience. It's so nice when a school turns out to be such a pleasant surprise.

Jenny Heitz 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 this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News and on Mamapedia, The Well Mom, Sane Moms, Hybrid Mom, The Culture 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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