

SECRET TIPS

DISCOVER THE SECRETS TO A WINNING SCHOOL APPLICATION



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INTRODUCTION



Jennifer Chin
Founder & CEO
Whizpa

“Parents in Hong Kong are blessed with an abundance of options when it comes to choosing the best schools for their children. However, it is important to remember that what's best for one child may not be the best for another.

Here, we have invited six experts to share their advice on how to go about finding a "dream school" for your child - whether you are considering schools in Hong Kong, or boarding schools and universities in the United Kingdom and the United States.

We hope you'll find these tips helpful!



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Whizpa.com is one of Hong Kong's leading online education platforms, helping to connect families with educators and activity providers. We enable parents to search for, review, and sign up for kids' activities and classes all on one convenient platform.

With over 6,000 providers listed on Whizpa.com, it is now easier than ever for parents to find the right programs for their children!





Ruth Benny
Founder & Head Girl
Top Schools

#1 Identify your preferences

Be open minded at this stage and not too prescriptive. Do not eliminate schools based on hearsay. Also, do not consider schools on a blind recommendation. Every parent recommends their own child's school; this is meaningless unless that parent also knows your child and is making the recommendation with your child in mind.

#2 Identify your priorities (a)

Most importantly, a foreign passport (not issued by HKSAR or PRC) is going to open more doors for you (at international schools). The passport must be held by your child, not the parents.

#3 Identify your priorities (b)

If your child is currently enrolled in the kindergarten, if you have an older child in the school, your child's nationality and/or a debenture will all earn you priority, as well as alumni status. It's important to know where you have advantages, even if you don't end up using them.

#4 Know your child

No-one knows your child as well as you - the parents - do. Be honest with yourselves about their personality and proficiency and where you feel may fit him or her best.

#5 Don't buy brand

Resist the temptation to go for the top brand schools. The school that fits your colleagues' or relatives' children may not suit yours. In fact, it may be the absolute worst school for your child.

#6 Visit the schools

There is no shortcut for this. No virtual tour or second-hand information can substitute for your own two feet traipsing from classroom to classroom and your feeling as you leave the campus.

#7 Apply to no more than 3 schools

If you apply to the right schools at the right time in the right way, three is plenty. Cut out the 'noise' and stick with your shortlist based on your preferences, priorities and your child's personality and proficiency.

#8 Be respectful of the application process.

Don't apply too early, where you may be left in the difficult position of receiving early offers that you're not sure of. Don't attach portfolios to international school applications; this may count against you. Submit what is required - all of it, but ONLY what is required.

#9 Trust your instinct

If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Conversely, if it feels like home, investigate moving in.

#10 Keep expenses down

No need to apply to too many schools; not usually a need to secure places with deposits you may risk forfeiting later. Consider hiring a schools consultant to manage these expenses for you and get the best result.

“After having a first meeting with my consultant (who is an experienced mom herself), I felt a lot more in control of the process. She definitely gave me info that I wouldn't have gotten researching the web.”



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For families and their employers, we offer a comprehensive School Placements Service for children aged 2-16. We guide parents to gain admission into Hong Kong's top private, international schools.

For companies, we offer talks to staff/clients, workshops and strategic advice on debentures as well as a placements service for international assignees and local staff without the need for corporate debentures.

For schools, we offer a range of services aimed at increasing top schools' exposure, engagement and, ultimately, enrolment. We offer professional recruitment services as a specialist in the hiring of senior leaders, academic and support staff for Hong Kong's top schools.

www.topschools.com.hk



Anne Murphy
Director
ITS Education Asia

#1 Be realistic about your school choices

Learn about the number of places offered for the specific grade your child is eligible for. Understand their priority system (if any), ask about potential offer of assessment/interview. Don't apply to a school and waste money on an application fee, if your child is amongst a pool of 700 applicants for 100 places and has no priority or may not be offered an interview.

#2 Be strategic about your approach to choosing schools

Research schools, visit campuses. Learn about their academic programs/teacher-student ratio/co-curricular activities/teacher retention, etc. Make sure you apply to a school which gives you a good feeling during your school visit. Don't just apply to a school because of 'hearsay' or because it's the most widely promoted school on social media.

#3 Know when to apply

Applications open at various times throughout the year. Make sure to mark the exact dates for your specific schools. Don't leave the application till the last few days. Make sure you have up-to-date school reports, passport copies, passport photos, etc. Review and review your application before you submit.

#4 Don't listen to all the social media hype about what schools are best. Choose a school that is right for your child and your family. Be selective!

The school choice you make must be right for your child and your family. No two schools are the same and no two children are similar. Your child is unique and so the school you choose must be the 'right fit'.

#5 Understand the admissions process

Learn about what is expected of your child during the assessment/interview. Be prepared if there is also a parent interview. Know about the school in great detail.

#6 Be honest about your child's strengths and weaknesses

You should be honest about your child. "He is too generous/polite" is not a weakness. It shows a parent trying to work the system and come off with a portrait of a perfect child, when schools know children are not perfect and do not expect them to be. I advise parents to "brag" honestly about their child. When providing a strength and weakness, I advise them to list a strength, offer an example, and also list a second strength and give the weakness that goes along with it.

#7 Learn to play the 'waiting game'

It's important to realise that the waiting game is so hard. You have no power. It takes a few months to hear whether your application was successful, and if your child will be offered an interview. Try not to worry and be patient. If you choose schools where there is a high chance of an interview, you can relax. At least your child will be given the opportunity to prove they are suitable for the school.

#8 Don't be afraid to talk with admissions managers

Admissions managers are extremely busy in Hong Kong and it's not an easy task keeping parents happy and dealing with all their concerns about their precious little ones gaining a place. They are very helpful, professional and friendly. Open the communication channel after you file the application and remain in contact. Many of them are parents and have gone through the exact same process. This doesn't mean hound them daily, but rather, gently remind them about your interest in the school (if your child is on a waitlist after an interview).

#9 Have a 'safe bet'

Apply to no more than 4 to 5 schools. You can't put all your eggs in one basket. It will be a great disappointment if you only apply to two schools and both schools are unable to offer you a place. You should only apply to schools that match your needs and only apply to schools where you can envision your child attending.

#10 Avoid 'over coaching' your child

You should be careful not to stress your child out about the interview/assessment.

“*Looking for a top international school in Hong Kong, we were referred to Anne at ITS. Anne meticulously formulated and seamlessly executed a plan. The kids are now settled at our first choice school.*”

Prepare your child for the interview and say something like "this is a school which we really like and we think you will too - we want you to visit so you can play games with the teachers and you can tell them all about your family, school and what you like to do." A few months prior to the interview, set up extra playdates, enrol your child in new activities with new instructors and children (drama/sports/storytelling - all which will build social confidence and teach them about following instructions). Spend time at home reading with your child, speak to them like they are adults (no baby talk), teach them new words (age-appropriate). Develop conversations with them and entice them to talk more. Don't turn your child into a robot - teachers want to interview children who are natural, happy and relaxed.



ITS Education Asia is an educational consultancy that provides school placement consultancy services for parents to find and choose schools and universities for their children. Our diverse team of education experts offer parents from both Hong Kong and Worldwide advice in all areas of education.

www.itseducation.asia



Jennifer Ma
Founder & Director
Arch Education

#1 Do background research

It's very difficult to get started on your school search if you don't know where to even begin. Speak to family and friends who have had experience with different boarding schools, and ask about the pros and cons of each institution. Ask them for recommendations on who else you could speak to or contact. As you learn more about different schools, you will also be able to better define the type of education and environment that you are looking for.

#2 Read up on inspection reports

There are official inspection reports published on schools. For example, in the UK, they are often administered by OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) or ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate). There are also third party reviews such as the Good Schools Guide which may offer insightful anecdotes. These reports will cover a wide range of school features including the quality of their pastoral care, operations management, financial health, teaching delivery and learning outcomes, etc.

#3 Book in a school visit or attend a school fair

There is no better way to get a genuine "feel" of the school's culture other than paying the school a visit. You will be able to appreciate if the environment is suitable for your child, if the school is as good as it claims on paper and in photos, and most importantly, whether you feel the school is of the right "style" and culture for your child. All these qualitative elements are hard to articulate, and need to be experienced to know for sure.

If visiting the school physically is not possible, you may browse through the website which may offer video clips featuring the school grounds or video interviews of students and faculty. Alternatively, you may register your interest with the school who will inform you when they are next in town attending a school fair or hosting a reception for prospective parents. Attend with your child so you can all get to know the school better.

#4 Prepare for assessments early

Schools abroad follow different systems. In the UK, most schools have their own process of assessments, and each school may offer different intake points, adhere to different timelines and require different assessments to be sat. In the US, students will often be required to sit the SSAT which has a high emphasis on vocabulary and comprehension skills. So, you must be aware of the necessary assessments, and start preparing early! It is recommended to start at least one year in advance, if not two for certain competitive schools.

#5 Encourage child autonomy in making school choice

Parents often feel that their children, at the time of considering boarding schools, perhaps at the age of 9-13, are still not mature enough to make decisions. You would be surprised at how accurate "gut" feeling is and children's instinct is often the most telling of their aspirations and preferences. We highly encourage parents to accompany their children in browsing the websites, watching the school videos that often feature the school grounds, and bringing them to school visits, if possible.

#6 Hone transferrable skillsets that will allow them to excel at the new school

Getting into a good school is not the ultimate goal. Remember boarding school is a stepping stone into university, and life. It is important for parents not to focus on cramming children on the assessment tests, but ensure they hone their genuine ability in transferrable skills, such as in critical thinking, reading, writing and speaking.

We often encourage children to engage in small group classes rather than private one-on-ones in order to encourage them to be immersed in discussion based learning environments, akin to the boarding school way of teaching.

#7 Align school choice to the child's interests beyond the classroom

Many children may be affected by peer influence and opt for extracurricular activities that are not aligned to their interest – e.g. playing piano for the sake of fulfilling a school requirement. We would highly encourage children to reflect upon their interests, and seek out a school that offers the facilities and the support to nurture their specific interest or passion.

#8 Try out summer boarding camps to ensure children are ready

Going to a boarding school means children will need to do their own laundry, tidy their beds and manage their own timetable! Whilst all these daily tasks help develop the children's personality and independence, we should ensure they are ready to embrace the potential challenge and change of environment. A short summer boarding camp could serve as a taster of boarding school life. Both children and parents will then know if their children, and in some cases, if parents, are ready!

#9 Ranking as reference, right fit is the key

Ranking tables vary – they take into account different factors and often are largely based on academic results, therefore they may not be a comprehensive reflection of a school.

“*I find ARCH extremely helpful in terms of exam preparation and admissions to top UK boarding schools. I got offers from all the boarding schools I applied to.*”

Instead of placing too high an emphasis on the rankings, parents should reference the school's mission and vision and the wide variety of offerings beyond academics, to see if the school aligns with your education philosophy; and most importantly whether it is the right fit for your child.

#10 Interview preparation does not mean cramming model answers

Interview formats can vary, ranging from skype, 1-on-1 in person, group interviews to weekend interviews involving the child spending a night at the school. Admissions are often looking for the so-called “spark” in the child. This means children should not be learning off prepared scripts prior to interviews; instead, they should be encouraged to reflect upon their genuine interest and speak their mind. Children should be encouraged to reflect, practice elaborating on their responses, and express their opinions, whilst having fun at the interviews!



Founded in 2009 by Oxbridge and Ivy League graduates, ARCH's mission is to bridge the education gap in skills, preparation, academics, careers and opportunities. Through the combined approach of delivering transformational programs and providing expert guidance on international education, we equip students for their future educational and career goals.

ARCH's global team of admissions consultants extend comprehensive guidance to students applying to top boarding schools and universities in the UK, US and Hong Kong.

www.arch-education.com



Emerson Blais
Principal & Co-Founder
Causeway Education

#1 Demystify the process

Fear of the unknown is one of the most debilitating burdens of the application process. With so many different schools, requirements, deadlines, and fees, the thought of simply learning it all is dizzying enough to quit. But, it's never too late to start! Make a mental commitment to doing the research. Yes, this will take some hard work and more than a second of your time. And, staying organized is key. Yet, if you approach this process with curiosity and excitement, your journey to admissions success will be far more efficient and fulfilling!

#2 Request information now

Many parents and students believe that the application process begins about a year before admission. Yet, that's not necessarily true. Save yourself a headache, and tick the very first box by requesting information from several schools, which can be done years ahead of time. In fact, it's actually required! While you may not be certain of the exact schools to which you'd like to apply, registration is free and takes only a few minutes. Then, you'll begin to receive regular updates from those schools and even special notifications or application tips!

#3 Build a support team

You don't have to do this alone. Perhaps, the most essential tactics to successful admissions include reaching out to others. If it takes a village to raise a child, ask family, friends, and neighbors about their experiences in the US Boarding School application process. The chances are that they know exactly what you're experiencing.

When it comes to hiring consultants, don't fall for guarantees. Think of us more as dedicated and knowledgeable time-savers. We've done the research and gained admission more than a once, providing you with clear, concise, personal pathways to successful entry.

#4 Scroll & stroll

One of the simplest bits of the entire process may be scrolling through websites. Knowledge is power. And, the more you know about each school, the better. Catalog key characteristics like location, academics, facilities, athletics, etc. in a nice and neat digital notebook. Bonus points for sharing files with family and friends who can add comments or info! In addition to a digital visit, plan actual campus strolls whenever possible. Schools will never admit this, but showing up face to face does make a difference. Show your enthusiasm by asking questions and wearing a smile, while making your name known.

#5 Control timelines

In a perfect world, you've given yourself years of flexibility. Yet, even in last-minute crunches, you're still in control. Breathe. Know your deadlines. That terrifying chopping block may be further off than you think. Deadlines may even be rolling, ready whenever! Do your best to note who needs what when. Some schools may offer priority admissions for getting it all done early. Start there. Applications. Visits. Interviews. Tests. Visas. Check every box, one at a time. It's a lot to juggle, but that's why you've built a support team!

#6 Hunt & gather

Essential to completing those applications? Stuff. In addition to the schools' actual applications, you may be required to provide 1) school transcripts, 2) recommendations 3) standardized test scores, 4) essays or questionnaires, 5) parent statements, and/or 6) writing samples. Some schools even recommend you include artwork or videos. Approach it all methodically. Remember: the same transcripts, test scores, and recommendations can be sent to every school! That's half of it all sorted. Just be sure to give your teachers enough time to write you something thoughtful and exemplary.

#7 Know thyself

What are you looking for in a school? There are a wide variety of reasons to apply, but in the end, they've got to be personal. Don't chase ranks or brands. Actively pursue the cultures they embody. While academics are paramount for a successful application, any admissions officer will tell you that a 'good fit' makes the difference. Identify what makes you you. Be yourself! But, that doesn't mean you can't leave a little bit of room for growth in the direction you desire. Ultimately, schools search high and low for applicants who enthusiastically exemplify them.

#8 Make a properly honest list

With this in mind, every student is unique, and so is every school. While you may want to force the puzzle pieces into place, they might not fit comfortably or at all. Think about what's right for you, academically, athletically, culturally, etc. and then sit down and write a list of schools. Be sure to include not only your 'reaches' but also your 'targets' and 'safeties.' And, by the way, you should be excited about them all! Let's be honest. Not everybody goes to Phillips Exeter, and that's OK! Every door leads to another. Believe in yourself, and you'll always find success.

#9 Prepare to take assessments

Although they're not always necessary, standardized test scores, such as those from the SSAT, ISEE, TOEFL, TOEFL Jr. or IELTS, or even the PSAT/ACT/SAT, may be requested. Each test offers its own challenges, and understanding key strategies associated with success proves essential to entering elite percentiles.

The ACT Math/Science prep and IB Biology SL classes are very informative, with well structured, detailed, and informative lessons. There is an abundance of supplementary material that is provided, such as past papers, question banks, and practice tests.

Take the time to prepare, register, and sit for yours. In general, you'll want a minimum of two months to get into fighting shape. Try taking a diagnostic test early, identifying your strengths and weaknesses for a more focused and efficient approach to the process.

#10 Enjoy the interview

Yeah, right! Right? While that may sound impossible, you should foster a positive attitude about sharing who you are with interviewers. Entering your interview with energetic enthusiasm can separate you from the pack. Share your interests in education and beyond! Ask questions. Some students attempt to memorize common questions and their 'appropriate' responses, but robots need not apply. This experience should be conversational, and ad hoc answers are invaluable. In fact, it's not so much what you say but how you say it. Laugh. Joke. But, dress the part. After all, this is your audition in the school play.



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Martin Campion
Founder & Senior Advisor
CAMPION College Consultancy

#1 Work hard

Perhaps you didn't want to hear that but your grades are the main criterion that UK universities consider. The higher they are, the more choice you will give yourself. Anyway, it's a good habit to take with you! Leave this until your final year at your peril: the academic profile universities see is based mainly on your performance in Year 12.

#2 Cover your prerequisites

That might sound a bit rude but this refers to subjects you must study at IB, DSE or A level in order to qualify for certain degree courses; mainly but not exclusively in the sciences. This subject choice is made 2 to 3 years prior to application; so, start your research early!

#3 Research, research, research

Obvious? Yes – but done poorly by 90% of students in Hong Kong. Some of those students arrive for their 3 to 4 years of study and get a nasty shock when their course or the university itself is not what they expected. This should be done well in advance of your application year and should be a pleasure in itself.

#4 Take off the blinkers

We all know the 'brand' universities but they're not always the ones that do your choice of course the best (see Subject Rankings for a change). Moreover, their brand often drives up their price (i.e. grades required) and may make them an unrealistic choice for you. With deeper research, you are more likely to find the universities where you will really thrive and succeed, sometimes at a bargain 'price'.

#5 Be ambitious but realistic

You have 5 choices in UCAS. As with any destination, have 'reach, fit and safety' choices. The UK is the most prescriptive in terms of entry requirements, specifying both grades and subjects required. It's unwise to have more than one choice above your predicted grades as you are likely to be 'unsuccessful'. On the other hand, don't dismiss somewhere because its entrance requirements are low: this is a reflection of 'Supply and Demand', not quality.

#6 Take a punt

If you have fabulous grades and relish the intensity of the academic experience at Oxford or Cambridge, go for it. It isn't the preserve of the English aristocracy (I went there and I'm not at all posh) but you do have to be very clever and very motivated.

#7 Look at the map

You can fit 40 UKs into the USA! Distances and travel times reflect that contrast but many students make assumptions about distances and climate that lead them to restrict their choices to London and surrounding counties. Go North, young man! – or at least consider it.

#8 Watch your English

Appreciate the simplicity of the UCAS form and process, especially the fact you only have to write one Personal Statement for all five applications. Practise (with an 's') and proofread – there are no excuses for poor English and it will be noted! In a recent ACS survey of admissions officers, 95% chose 'Good Written English' as an essential attribute that they look for.

#9 Course is King

"It is really important to emphasise that certainly Oxford, and many other UK universities, are primarily selecting students on their academic suitability for a particular course." - Mike Nicholson, former director of undergraduate admissions at the University of Oxford. In the ACS survey mentioned above, 95% of admissions officers chose 'Evidence of passion for chosen subject' as an essential attribute. Note the word 'evidence'; not declaration. 'Prove' it in your Personal Statement by reference to study and experiences beyond your school curriculum.

I am just really thankful to Mr. Champion. He is very sensible and experienced but, more than that, he stimulated me to think holistically and helped me develop the skills and confidence to attain my goal.

#10 Finally - own the process

This is your life decision; your transition to adulthood and independence. Take responsibility and make the most of this wonderful opportunity.

CAMPION

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CAMPION offers a new level of service to prepare students for the transition to Higher Education in the USA, UK and elsewhere. 1:1 guidance from the highly experienced senior advisor, Martin Champion (CIS and Yale awardee) is tailored to each student's unique context and aspirations.

Personalised programs focus on the last three years of high school and not just the admissions phase. Martin also offers 'clinic' hours to deal with specific requirements such as interviews and college essays. Free family consultations are encouraged prior to sign-up and parents are given weekly feedback on student progress.

<https://www.championhk.com/>



Gerardo Zepeda
Education Consultant
The Princeton Review HK

In 2017-18, Stanford University received over 44,000 applications. Nearly 1% of the applicants achieved a perfect SAT score, yet 69% of these students failed to receive an offer from Stanford. While meeting GPA and SAT/ACT requirements is crucial to getting past the first round of selection, students need to stand out from the crowd. Elite schools are bombarded by applicants with increasingly phenomenal profiles each year. Having the 'smarts' is simply not enough. Schools are looking for students who will accomplish world-changing feats and contribute positively to society. Think of US Presidents, tech moguls and famous entrepreneurs. Here are 10 tips to help you pave your path to top tier US institutions.

#1 Cultivate your grit

In her research, psychologist Angela Duckworth revealed that the secret to achievement isn't talent. Rather, it's a combination of persistence and passion – grit. Being gritty, is the ability to persevere. It's about being unusually resilient and hardworking in the face of difficulties, obstacles and even failures. Select one or two activities that you're deeply passionate about, envision your achievements and strive to accomplish what few others could do.

#2 Be willing to run longer and farther towards your Kaizen

Relying on your talents alone is insufficient. It's estimated that it takes 10,000 hours to master a skill.

Commit to continuously honing your craft and dedicate your time to a designated routine. Don't be afraid to test or measure your skills. Love the piano? Achieve a grade 8 certification and compete in district, city-wide and regional competitions. Don't hesitate to try, try and try again.

#3 Start early and plan ahead

Studies show that 90% of executives consistently wake up before 6am. It's reported that Apple CEO Tim Cook gets up at 3:45 every morning to check his emails, exercise and grab a cup of coffee before heading to work. Take time each morning to plan out your day and commit to completing your tasks. More importantly, embrace a strategic mindset and carefully plan out your path towards university application. Practice extreme self-discipline, commit to your plans and hold yourself accountable.

#4 Hone your work ethic

Augusta Uwamanzu-Nna, from Long Island, New York was admitted to all 8 Ivy League schools. When asked about the steps she took to get there, she revealed that although she "struggled with numerous classes in the past... what allowed [her] to be successful ultimately in those classes, at the end, [was her] persistence and [her] tenacity." Your academic grades hold a lot of power over your college application. Similar to showcasing your past achievements, they also reflect your potential to succeed in college.

#5 Test prep drills

Over 3 million new students enroll in American universities and colleges each year. Love it or hate it, top schools require either the SAT or ACT. Although there's a growing number of test-optional institutions - schools that don't require the submission of standardized test scores - these remain the exception, rather than the rule. Thus, taking the SAT or ACT will provide you with a greater number of options that would otherwise be closed to you.

#6 Plan ahead

Applying to college takes extensive planning. Preparing for your academic profile, improving your test scores, participating in extracurricular activities and researching schools. All the things students need to do may seem daunting, but when divided over four-years of high school, it's definitely possible. As a student, it's crucial for you to anticipate upcoming milestones, set appropriate targets and allocate sufficient time to accomplish your goals.

#7 Develop effective communication skills

Learning how to communicate your ideas in an interesting and concise manner is invaluable. Whether it's through written text or oral communication, your ability to effectively express yourself with charisma will help you succeed in your admission interviews and personal statements.

#8 Learn to take criticism

Critiques from others are difficult to bear, especially if you've worked really hard on a particular assignment or project. Hearing your faults pointed out can be very challenging. However, the process of receiving feedback helps you to improve and succeed. Admission officers are eager to assess your growth and development throughout your high school years. So learn to accept critiques in stride and strive for continual improvement.

“*The Princeton Review is a place where you can learn effective techniques without it being boring.*”

#9 Showing long-term commitment

Sometimes it can be tough to stay enthusiastic about the task at hand. However, learning how to keep up with your day to day responsibilities is important. Rather than focusing on the quantity of extracurricular activities that you engage in, select a couple that you're deeply passionate about and continually work on them throughout your high school career. This helps to demonstrate your ability to commit to your obligations and the capacity to focus on long-term goals.

#10 Learn to be an effective leader

Whether it's student clubs, team sports or in the classroom environment, take every opportunity to hone your leadership skill. An effective leader is more than just being the person in charge, it's about inspiring and guiding your team members to push themselves to their highest potential. Remember, admission officers are eagerly looking for the next Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg or Ruth Bader Ginsburg who will change the world and bring fame to their elite institution.



 Sara Beattie College

The Princeton Review is a US publishing company globally renowned for our high quality test prep materials and courses, and we're currently in over 16 countries. We have loyally served the Hong Kong community for the past 30 years.

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