JP MARKETING

GUIDE + CHECKLIST

How to Set Up & Optimize Your Google Business Profile

A step-by-step guide + checklist for private schools

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Why your Google profile matters so much

When someone near Franklin, TN searches for private schools, Google shows a map with 3 businesses on top. That's called the **Map Pack**. Most calls go to those 3.

Your **Google Business Profile** (people still call it "GMB") is what shows up there. It's free. And it's often the very first thing a new family sees.

This guide shows you how to set it up the right way, step by step, for private schools. No tech skills needed.

What you'll get:

- A profile that shows up for more searches
- More calls, website clicks, and more applications and enrollments
- Fewer mistakes that can get your profile suspended
- A simple weekly routine to keep it strong

> **Heads up:** Google changes this stuff a lot. In late 2025 Google started removing the old **Questions & Answers** section from profiles and replacing it with an AI "Ask" feature in Maps. The AI reads your profile, your reviews, and your website to answer questions. So keeping everything complete and correct matters more than ever.

Words to know

Word	What it means
Google Business Profile	Your free listing on Google Maps and search. Also called GMB.
Map Pack	The top 3 businesses on the map.
Category	The label that says what kind of business you are.
Attribute	Little tags like 'wheelchair accessible.'
Service area business	A business that goes to its customers.

Word	What it means
Verification	Proving to Google your business is real.
UTM tag	Extra words at the end of a link that help you track where visits came from.

Before you start: gather this stuff

- [ ] Your exact business name (the one on your sign, your license, and your paperwork)
- [ ] Your real address (and whether customers come to you)
- [ ] Your main phone number (a local number is best)
- [ ] Your website link
- [ ] Your hours (and holiday hours)
- [ ] A list of every service you offer
- [ ] 10 to 20 good photos (more on this below)
- [ ] Your logo and a cover photo
- [ ] A Google account that the business owns (not a staff member's personal email)

> **Tip:** Use a Google account the business owns, like admin@yourbusiness.com. If an employee sets it up with their own Gmail and then leaves, you can lose control of your profile.

Step 1: Find or create your profile

1. Go to **google.com/business** and sign in.
2. Search for your business name. It might already exist (Google sometimes makes profiles on its own).
3. If it exists, click **Claim** or **Request access**.
4. If it doesn't exist, click **Add your business**.

If someone else (like an old marketing company) owns it, use the request access button. Google will email them. If they don't answer in about 7 days, you can often claim it yourself.

Step 2: Use your real business name

Use your name **exactly** as it looks on your sign and paperwork. Example: **Harpeth Ridge Academy**.

Do **not** add extra words like your city or services. Like this:

Bad (can get you suspended)	Good
Harpeth Ridge Academy - Best Private School Franklin	Harpeth Ridge Academy
Harpeth Ridge Academy / Pre-K & Kindergarten / Lower School	Harpeth Ridge Academy

Yes, adding keywords can help for a little while. But competitors report it, and Google can suspend you. It's not worth it.

Step 3: Pick the right categories (this is HUGE)

Your **primary category** is one of the biggest things Google uses to decide when to show you.

Best primary category for most private schools: Private School (or Christian School / Elementary School / Middle School / High School if that fits better).

Good secondary categories to think about (only pick ones that are true for you):

- Christian School (if faith-based)
- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Preschool (if you have one)
- Kindergarten

How to double-check: Search Google Maps for "private school franklin tn". Look at the top 3. Click each one and see what category shows under their name. If they all use the same one, that's a strong clue.

> **Tip:** You can have 1 primary and up to 9 secondary categories. Don't add categories just to add them. Every one should match something you really do.

Step 4: Address or service area

There are two kinds of businesses on Google:

Type	What it means	What you do
Storefront	Families come to your place	Show your address
Service area business	You go to them	Hide your address and list the cities you serve
Both	You have an office AND go out	Show your address AND add service areas

Big rules:

- You need a real address to verify. No P.O. boxes. No UPS Store boxes. No virtual offices.
- Only make a profile for a place where you really work, with real staff during your hours.
- If you have more than one real location, each one gets its own profile.

Step 5: Hours

Put your real hours. Then:

- Add **special hours** for every holiday (Google will remind you)
- Use 'More hours' for things like phone hours, kids' hours, or online hours if they're different
- Never say 24 hours unless a real person answers 24 hours

Wrong hours = angry families = bad reviews.

Step 6: Phone number and website

Phone: Use a local number that a real person answers. If you use call tracking, put the tracking number as the **primary** number and your real number as an **additional** number. That keeps things matching.

Website: Link to your homepage (or the location page if you have more than one location). Add a tracking tag to the end of the link so you can see these visits in Google Analytics:

```
https://yourwebsite.com/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=gbp
```

Booking link: If you have one, add it in the **Appointments** field. Your main goal is to get people to book a campus tour, so make it one click.

Step 7: Add every service

Go to **Edit services**. Add each service with a short description (2 to 3 sentences). Here are good ones for private schools:

- Pre-K and Kindergarten
- Lower School (grades 1-5)
- Middle School (6-8)
- Upper School / High School (9-12)
- Advanced / AP / Dual Enrollment
- Athletics
- Fine Arts
- Learning Support
- Before and after care
- Bus or carpool options
- Summer programs

Write each description like you're talking to a neighbor. Use the words people search for. Example:

> **Pre-K & Kindergarten** - We help families in Franklin with pre-k & kindergarten. [Add one sentence on what makes yours different, like speed, experience, or price.] Book a campus tour today.

Step 8: Write your business description

You get 750 characters. Use them. Say who you help, what you do, where you do it, and what to do next. No links, no ALL CAPS, no sales spam.

Example:

> Harpeth Ridge Academy is a private Christian school in Franklin, TN serving students from Pre-K through 12th grade. Small classes, caring teachers, strong academics, athletics, and fine arts help each student grow in mind and character. Bus routes serve Brentwood and Spring Hill. Schedule a campus tour today.

Step 9: Turn on attributes

Attributes are little tags like "wheelchair accessible" or "online appointments." Turn on every one that's true. Good ones for private schools:

- Wheelchair accessible
- Appointment required (for tours)
- Online appointments
- Women-led / veteran-led (if true)

Step 10: Add great photos

Profiles with lots of real photos get more clicks. Start with **at least 10**, then add a few every week.

Photos to take:

- Front of campus and sign
- Classrooms and labs
- Library
- Gym, fields, and arts spaces
- Students in class (with photo consent)
- Teachers and leadership
- Chapel (if faith-based)
- Events: graduation, games, plays (with consent)

Photo tips:

- Use real photos. No stock pictures.
- Bright light, phone held sideways (landscape).
- Logo: square. Cover photo: wide.
- Short videos (under 30 seconds) work great too.
- Add new photos every week. It tells Google you're active.

Step 11: Get verified

Google needs to know you're real. It might ask for:

- **A video:** You film your sign, your office or your work gear, and proof you run the business (like opening the office door with your key). Keep it one take, no cuts.
- **A phone call or text code**
- **An email code**
- **A postcard** (less common now)

> **Tip:** For video verification, film the outside (street sign or building number), then walk in and show your workspace, tools, and something with your business name on it. Plan your video before you hit record.

Step 12: Build a review system

Reviews help you rank AND help people pick you. More reviews, newer reviews, and reviews that mention your services and city all help.

The simple system:

1. Get your review link. In your profile, click **Ask for reviews** and copy the link.
2. Ask at the happiest moment (right after a great visit or job).
3. Send the link by text. Texts get way more reviews than emails.
4. Follow up once, 2 days later, if they didn't leave one.
5. Reply to **every** review within 2 days.

Sample review request text:

> Dear [Parent Name], thank you for being part of the Harpeth Ridge family! If you have a minute, would you share your experience on Google? It helps families like yours find us. [Review Link] Go Hawks!

Rules: Never pay for reviews. Never offer gifts for reviews. Never write fake ones. Never ask only happy people while blocking unhappy ones (this is called "review gating" and Google doesn't allow it).

How to reply to a 5-star review:

> Thank you so much, [First Name]! We're so glad you had a great experience. See you next time! - [Your Name], Harpeth Ridge Academy

How to reply to a bad review:

> Thank you for telling us. We're sorry this happened. That's not the experience we want for anyone. Please call [owner name] at [phone] so we can make it right.

> **Kids' privacy:** Never name a child in a reply, and never share anything about a child's behavior or progress. Keep replies about the school and the experience.

Step 13: Post every week

Posts show up on your profile and keep it fresh. Post once a week (twice is even better). Ideas: offers, events, tips, team spotlights, and new photos. (See our **30 Google Business Profile Post Examples** guide for Private Schools.)

Step 14: Answer questions (the new way)

The old Q&A section is going away. Now Google's AI answers questions using your profile, reviews, and website. So:

- Make a strong FAQ section on your website with real answers
- Keep your services, hours, and attributes complete
- Ask for reviews that mention the details people care about
- Use posts to share important info (like new hours or new services)

Step 15: Keep your profile safe

- Add a backup owner (you + a trusted partner)
- Give staff 'Manager' access, not 'Owner'
- Never share your Google password
- Check your profile weekly for 'suggested edits' from Google or strangers
- Don't change your name, address, or category a lot. Big changes can trigger a new verification.

Special tips for Private Schools

One profile per campus

If you have a lower school and upper school on different campuses, each real campus can have its own profile. Don't make profiles for buildings that aren't separate campuses.

Admissions link

Use your 'Visit' or 'Inquire' page as the appointment link. That's your main goal.

Events are big

Open houses, shadow days, and admissions events are perfect Google Event posts. Post them 4-6 weeks early.

Faith-based schools

Say your faith identity clearly. Many families search 'Christian school Franklin TN'. If you're faith-based, add that category.

Reviews from parents and alumni

Reviews from current parents and alumni help a lot. Ask after good moments: graduation, a big win, re-enrollment.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Leaving 'Tuition' questions unanswered anywhere online
- No photos of real campus life
- Old phone numbers going to a general line no one answers
- Event posts that expire with no new ones
- Student photos with no consent
- Name stuffing ('Harpeth Ridge Academy Best Private School Franklin')

Your weekly 15-minute routine

Day	Task	Time
Monday	Add 2 to 3 new photos	3 min
Tuesday	Publish this week's post	5 min
Every day	Send review links to happy families	2 min
Friday	Reply to all new reviews	3 min
Friday	Check for edits and wrong info	2 min

One-page setup checklist

Setup

- [ ] Profile claimed with a business-owned Google account
- [ ] Backup owner added
- [ ] Real business name (no extra keywords)
- [ ] Best primary category picked
- [ ] Secondary categories added (only true ones)
- [ ] Address or service area set the right way
- [ ] Hours + holiday hours correct
- [ ] Local phone number that a real person answers
- [ ] Website link with tracking tag
- [ ] Booking / appointment link added
- [ ] Every service added with a short description
- [ ] 750-character description written
- [ ] All true attributes turned on
- [ ] Logo and cover photo uploaded
- [ ] 10+ real photos uploaded
- [ ] Verified

Ongoing

- [ ] Post every week
- [ ] Add photos every week
- [ ] Ask every happy family for a review
- [ ] Reply to every review
- [ ] Update holiday hours
- [ ] Check for wrong edits every week
- [ ] Keep website FAQs up to date

Common questions

How long until I see results?

Fixes like the right category and more services can help within a few weeks. Reviews and posts build over months.

My profile got suspended. What now?

Don't make a new one. Fix whatever broke the rules (name, address, category), then ask Google to reinstate it with proof like a business license and photos.

Can I have more than one profile?

Only one per real location with staff during business hours.

Want us to do this for you?

JP Marketing helps local businesses show up on Google, Google Maps, and AI search tools like ChatGPT. We build the websites, write the pages, run the ads, and set up the follow-up.

Book a free strategy call at jpmarketing.co. We'll look at your site and your Google profile, and show you the 3 fastest wins for your business.

Rules on Google, Meta, and AI tools change a lot. This guide was last updated November 2026. It is general marketing info, not legal advice.