

THE BRITISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Children from families of the United States, NATO visiting forces, and civilian components are entitled to attend British state school (public school) free of charge. However, because of the potential difficulties in transferring back to the U.S. system at the end of a tour of duty, one should investigate the advantages and disadvantages thoroughly before deciding whether to place their children in a British or U.S. Department of Defence Dependent schools.

Schooling is compulsory in England for all children between 5 and 16 years of age. Some provision is made for children under 5 and many pupils remain at school after the minimum leaving age of 16. Education from 16 to 18 is usually referred to as "the Sixth Form", with the lower Sixth and the upper Sixth. During this time, students take "A" levels which gain them entry into the University or College system after age 18.

The term "school" in England normally refers to establishments which provide education for students between the ages of 5 and 18 years. It is not generally used to describe colleges, like medical, dental, language, art or drama school.

All children in Britain are entitled to receive free education at state funded schools and most children are educated within this system. However, there are a number of independent schools which are privately maintained from fees (paid either by parents or awarded scholarships) and confusingly these are known as "Public Schools". The school year runs from September to July and is divided into three terms

(semesters), spring, summer and autumn terms and each term lasts approximately 10 weeks. Elementary schools are called "Primary" schools and high schools are called "Secondary" schools in England. All schools are required to give religious education and perform a daily act of worship, but any child may be withdrawn from religious activities at his or her parents' request.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

British law states that all children with special educational needs have a right to a broad and well-balanced education and this should include as much work as possible under the National Curriculum. Most of these needs will be met by mainstream schools, sometimes with the help of outside specialists. In some cases, the Local Education Authority (LEA) will have to make a statutory assessment based on specialist advice. The LEA may then draw up a Statement of Special Educational Needs, detailing the child's requirements individual provision. Sometimes it may be in a pupil's best interest to attend a special school but parents have a right to take part in decisions about their child's education and to be kept in touch at all stages. A Parent's Charter and a Guide to "Pupils with Problems" (as well as other educational circulars) are available from the Department for Education Publications Center, PO Box 2193, London E15 2EU. Telephone number: 0181-533-2000
From States Side: 011-44-181-5332000

NURSERY SCHOOLS (Kindergartens)

Some of these are privately funded





although some local authorities do provide them free. They take young children (2-5 years) for a certain number of half days per week, sometimes for longer. Parents will normally have to pay a fee for privately run nursery schools.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Primary schools are generally divided into **INFANTS** (1st - 2nd grades) and **JUNIORS** (3rd - 5th grades). The first class in the infant school is usually termed the Reception Class and each child automatically moves to the next higher class at the end of the school year. There is no system of promotion from one class to another by examination. There is a national curriculum (see below) in which the core subjects for Primary schools are English; Maths; Science; plus the foundation subjects of history; geography; technology; music; art, and physical education. At key stage 3 (11-14 year olds) all pupils must study a modern foreign language. For younger students particularly, many schools do not divide the curriculum into separate subject areas but integrate the subjects and plan learning around various topics. There is emphasis on allowing each child to progress at his or her own pace and on learning by discovering.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Within the National Curriculum, children are expected to take tests at 7, 11, and 14. During the school year, teachers will also assess their pupils' work, which then provides information for the parents on the child's progress.

The tests concentrate on the basics. A 7-year-old will be tested in reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and mathematics. The 11 and 14 year olds will be testing in English, mathematics, and science. The 7-year-olds will spend about 2.5 hours on tests, which is spread out

over the spring and summer terms. The 11-year-olds will do seven short tests totalling 4.5 hours. These tests are usually spread over a week in May. The 14-year-olds do six short tests in May, totalling 7 hours, spread over several days. Targets are set and each child will be at a level between 1 and 8. A typical 7-year-old should achieve level 2, a typical 11-year-old should achieve level 4 and a typical 14-year-old should achieve level 5 or 6. The child's school must send parents at least one written report per year with test results and progress. The school will also publish its overall results in its school prospectus and annual report, and they are then required to submit results to the Department of Education, who produces national league tables of schools. For a leaflet entitled "National School Tests", telephone the Department for Education on 0171-514-0162 (From State Side Dial 011-44-171-510-0162).

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Secondary schools provide education for students from 11-16 or 18 years. Each year, or grade, is usually referred to as a "Form". Children progress from 1st Form to 6th Form, but the 6th Form usually spans two years and is therefore known as the Lower 6th and Upper 6th. If schools only cater for pupils until the age of 16, then the students who wish to stay in full-time education will usually attend a local sixth form college.

The most common type of maintained secondary school is "Comprehensive" which caters to children of all abilities. Throughout secondary school, students study the same subjects as in the primary schools with the addition of one or more foreign languages.

At the age of 14-16, students study for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). There are a wide

variety of syllabuses produced by the five groups of examining boards throughout England and Wales. When the final grading for the certificates are awarded, some of the course work will be taken into account as well as performance in the actual examination. More able students will take another set of examinations at the end of their seventh year, known as "A" (Advanced) levels. Each student will usually take 2 or 3 A Level subjects and they will need to get certain grades in order to be accepted in a university.

GRANT MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Some secondary schools have chosen to "opt out" of local education authority control and become "Grant Maintained" schools. These schools still provide a free education to all pupils, but the Governing body of the school has responsibility for every aspect of the school, including paying teachers salaries, buying books, and maintaining and improving the school buildings. The Governing body comprises of the Head Teacher plus 20+ elected governors and teachers (a number of whom must have children at the school). The money to run the school comes direct from the Department of Education and is paid in an annual grant. The school also can apply for additional grants for building improvements or other schemes direct to the Department of Education. These schools are subject to the same standards and inspections as the local authority run schools.

PRIVATE EDUCATION

Independent schools are not run by local education authorities or through a grant maintained system. Instead they are funded by charging tuition fees. These fees vary widely depending on the type of school and the facilities it offers. The Independent Schools Information

Service (ISIS), (tel. 0171-630-8793 from State side dial 011-44-171-630-8793) annually publishes a book listing private schools, with details of fees and other important information.

1. Pre-Preparatory Schools

Pre-Preps, catering for 5-7 year olds, are usually a component of preparatory schools, named thus because they prepare children for the next stage of their education.

2. Preparatory Schools

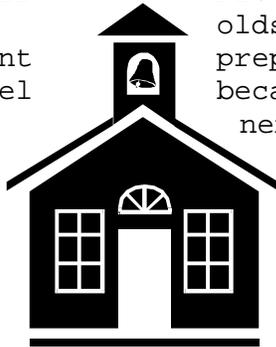
These educate children from 7-13 years of age. Boys usually move onto a public school at 13 after taking the Common Entrance Examination, girls may move at 11, 12 or 13. At independent schools, the school day is often longer than at state schools, perhaps 0800-1800 and often the students attend school on Saturday mornings as well. However, holidays are usually longer. Some Prep. Schools offer boarding facilities from as young as 7 years but some accept day pupils only.

3. Independent Secondary Schools (Public School)

The term "public school" is normally used to describe the longer established, more exclusive and expensive, traditionally all - boy boarding schools. Examples of well-known public schools are Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Marlborough, Stowe, and Winchester. Many of these boys' schools now accept girls in the sixth forms and some, such as Marlborough, are now totally co-educational. Educational standards at private schools, as at state schools, are vary but independent schools are subject to the same educational standards inspections as state schools.

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Most independent schools and a high



number of state schools require students to wear uniforms to school. This is usually a shirt, school tie, school sweater, and perhaps blazer (jacket) and plain colored skirt for girls and dark grey trousers for boys. Different schools favor different colors for uniform but the favorites are navy blue, dark green, red, and grey.

HOW TO REGISTER

Before approaching to any one school, it is a good idea to ask your work colleagues about their own experiences and recommendations. Some schools operate an "open day" once or twice a year, so that prospective students and their parents can look around the school and facilities.

The best way to register your child at the local state school is to visit the school in person and speak to the staff in the school office. They will be able to tell you if there are any vacancies and arrange an interview with the Head Teacher. However, if you need to speak to someone during the school holidays (vacations) you should telephone your local area education office which is listed under your local Council or Borough in the phone book.

Information about your child which you might be expected to provide includes name, sex, address, date of birth, nationality, proficiency in English, religion, health, special aptitudes, interests, deficiencies or problems which might affect education, and previous academic record.

To register at an independent school, you should telephone to arrange an interview with the Head Teacher. Following the offer of a place, a fee is normally requested upon registration which will be deducted from the final term's fees. A period of one term's notice of a child leaving an independent school is usually required.

To make the best decision, make sure you have all the relevant information you need. Help can be obtained from many sources: DoDDs; the British Department of Education; Local Authorities; individual schools; friends, and colleagues.

WEB SITES:

General School Information
www.bbc.co.uk/education

Westminster Area Schools
www.westminster.gov.uk

Hillingdon Area Schools
www.hillingdon.gov.uk

Harrow School
www.harrowschool.org.uk

UK Education Web Site
www.eduweb.co.uk

The National Association for Special Educational Needs
www.nasen.org.uk

Internet Resource for Special Children
www.irsc.org

March 1999

