



# Navigating the British School System

As residents of the UK, dependent members of the United States visiting forces including military, DoD civilians and contractors are entitled to a free education in the British state school system. Attending host-nation schools can be a terrific way for your child to experience the English culture and meet new people, but it is important to be prepared and understand the differences from the education systems you might be accustomed to in the U.S. It is critical to note that British schools are almost entirely exam-based and Standard Attainment Tests (SAT) are statutory at the end of each Key Stage. Test scores are reported to the Department of Education and entered into the National League Tables of schools each year. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) is the official regulator of schools and conducts inspections of each school in the country. Reports are published and available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

## Attendance

The school day typically starts at around 9:00 am and ends about 3:00 pm with a lunch break at noon and a morning recess break. The school year starts at the beginning of September and ends in the middle of July and is divided into three terms. Autumn Term is September through December, Spring Term is January through March and Summer Term is April through July. Each term is divided by a week-long half-term break where students are out of school and there is a two-week holiday break at Christmas and Easter. Summer break is approximately six weeks long. The holiday schedule will not always line up with your American holidays and your child will likely be in school on Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving, Independence Day, etc. Be up-front with the school regarding any holiday or vacation plans, but be aware that the school is not required to approve the absence. Attendance is mandated by law and the Local Authority has the power to ***fine*** families for non-attendance and unauthorized absences.

## Enrollment

You must submit an application for a school place through the Local Authority in which you live. Applications are usually submitted the year prior and spaces are awarded in the spring term for the following school year. New residents moving into the county/catchment area need to submit an In-Year Application. School preference can be indicated on the application, however schools with a good reputation tend to fill up quickly and each school and year group have a maximum number of students allowed. If the preferred school is full, the Local Authority is obliged to find a place for your student at the nearest school with availability. If a space was not allocated at your preferred school, you can submit an appeal by completing a form with your family's details and a justification why your child should be offered a place. This will be presented to an independent appeal panel for review and the panel's decision is final.

## Uniforms

State schools will require a uniform and each school sets their own standards. The uniform usually consists of a skirt or trousers (pants), button-down shirt, jumper (sweater), blazer and a tie. A PE kit uniform is usually also required for wear during physical education/sports. Parents are responsible for purchasing the uniform items.

## Transportation

Transportation to and from school is the responsibility of the parent, not the school. Public transportation/ charter bus service may be available at or near some schools, but the child will need to have a bus pass purchased. If you are unable to drive your child to and from school, ask the school what transport options are available. Keep in mind that sunset is quite early in the winter and it may be dark when your child is going to or coming from school if they have to walk to a bus stop.

## Meals

Some schools will offer lunches and some will expect students to bring a packed lunch. School meals are different than what your student had in the States. They might offer meals such as vegetable quiche, pasta, margherita pizza, curry, omelettes and pork sausages.

## Extracurricular Activities

Sports and extracurricular activities available will differ. Sports typically offered include rugby, volleyball, hockey, football (soccer, not American), netball, cricket, rounders, tennis, lacrosse, badminton, table tennis, strength and conditioning. The arts are often well-represented and activities include art, drama, music and dance. Many schools offer STEM and extended learning opportunities. Ask your school about after-school clubs and activities.

## Education Stages

Age on 31 Aug (before school year)	Year	Curriculum stage	Schools	
3	<a href="#">Nursery</a>	<a href="#">Foundation Stage</a>	<a href="#">Nursery school</a>	
4	<a href="#">Reception</a>		<a href="#">Infant school</a>	<a href="#">Primary school</a>
5	<a href="#">Year 1</a>			
6	<a href="#">Year 2</a>			
7	<a href="#">Year 3</a>			
8	<a href="#">Year 4</a>	<a href="#">Key Stage 2</a>	<a href="#">Junior school</a>	<a href="#">Primary school</a>
9	<a href="#">Year 5</a>			
10	<a href="#">Year 6</a>			
11	<a href="#">Year 7</a>			
12	<a href="#">Year 8</a>	<a href="#">Key Stage 3</a>	<a href="#">Secondary school</a>	<a href="#">Secondary school with sixth form</a>
13	<a href="#">Year 9</a>			
14	<a href="#">Year 10</a>			
15	<a href="#">Year 11</a>	<a href="#">Key Stage 4 / GCSE, etc.</a>	<a href="#">College/Sixth Form</a>	<a href="#">Secondary school with sixth form</a>
16	<a href="#">Year 12 (Lower Sixth)</a>	<a href="#">Sixth form / A level, International Baccalaureate, Cambridge Pre-U, etc.</a>		
17	<a href="#">Year 13 (Upper Sixth)</a>			

## **Primary School**

Children ages 4-11 in Key Stages 1 (age 4-7) and Key Stage 2 (7-11) attend primary school. Some schools offer Reception (Pre-kindergarten) for four-year-olds. Compulsory school age is five and children must be enrolled in full-time education in the term following their fifth birthday. The cutoff dates are 31 December, 31 March or 31 August. For example, if your child turns five on 15 December, he/she would be enrolled for the Spring Term into Year 1 in the middle of the year. Most follow the National Curriculum which requires teaching in English, maths, science, design and technology, history, geography, art and design, music, physical education (PE), including swimming, computing, ancient and modern foreign languages (at key stage 2). Schools must provide religious education (RE) but parents can ask for their children to be taken out of the whole lesson or part of it.

Year 1 students will have a phonics assessment in June in which they read 40 words aloud and will need to repeat the test in Year 2 if they do not pass. At the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7), students are assessed on English reading, English grammar, punctuation and spelling and maths. They will complete national exams on these topics at the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11).

In primary school, report cards are not commonly provided regularly throughout the year and will consist mostly of overall attainment scores rather than grades. Reports are typically provided once per year and Parent Evenings are held during each term to discuss the child's progress.

## **Secondary Schools**

Students between the ages of 11 and 16 attend Secondary School. The National Curriculum requires education in the subjects of English, maths, science, history, geography, modern foreign languages, design and technology, art and design, music, physical education, citizenship and computing in Key Stage 3. Schools must provide religious education (RE) and sex education, but parents can ask for their children to be taken out of the whole lesson or part of it.

During Key Stage 4, students work towards their national qualifications, usually the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education). At Year 10, studies become more specialized and students can elect which GCSE subjects they will take. English, maths and science are compulsory and students usually take at least an additional seven courses to study over a two-year period. Written work and modular/mock exams are completed throughout the course. Proctored, formal written exams are completed at the end of Year 11/Age 16 to earn qualification. Exam results are made available in mid-August.

Other qualification options include Business and Technology (BTEC) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program. BTEC provides a high-quality, hands-on learning experience in a range of vocational subjects as art and design, business, healthcare, engineering, IT, and service industries. Tests are completed on units throughout the course instead of one at the end. BTEC can be completed alone or alongside other GCSE/A-Level courses. IB is for ages 16-19 in six subject groups: Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Mathematics, Science, Arts. The three core elements for the program are: theory of knowledge, extended essay which is an independently completed 4,000 word paper, and creativity, activity and service in which the student completes a project related to these three concepts.

American students transitioning during Key Stage 4 may find it difficult to assimilate. Arriving midway through the two-year GCSE course will result in missed content which will be included in the final exam or work that will constitute part of the final grade. Alternatively,

students leaving before completing GCSEs may have difficulty in having their grades assessed for transcript transfer as grades are not typically awarded until the final assessments.

### **Post-Secondary Education**

Though education is compulsory until the age of eighteen, schooling is only required until age sixteen. After completing GCSEs, students can continue education in a Sixth Form college, attend vocational school, work in an apprenticeship, volunteer or go into the work force. Students attending Sixth Form in Year 12 and 13 will engage in a more intensive and specialized study of 3-4 subjects for another two years towards an Advanced-Level (or A-Level) exam and certification in those topics.

Upon completion of A-Levels, students can attend university. Most university courses (degree programs) take 3-4 years concentrating in one subject field. There are no general education requirements at the university level. University courses are mostly lecture and research-based. Entry into British universities usually require at least three A-Levels at grade E or above. All university applications are submitted through a central system, the Universities and College Admission Service (UCAS) and students do not apply to each school separately. The application deadline is usually 15 December and is limited to 6 courses or institutions.

Because the British system begins specializing in subject at a much earlier stage than American schools, British students tend to be further ahead in these chosen subjects, but lack a broader knowledge base in general subjects.

During secondary school, you will likely receive a progress report each term. Parent Evenings are held during each term to discuss the child's progress. Most secondary schools operate on a Tutor (homeroom) system. Your student will be assigned to a Form Tutor (homeroom teacher) and will have one class period with this teacher daily. The Form Tutor is usually the first point of contact in the event of any issues.

### **Types of Schools**

State schools:

- **Maintained/Community:** Funded and controlled by the local authority and is not influenced by business or religious groups. Must follow the national curriculum.
- **Academy:** Funded directly by the government, not by a local authority. Not required to follow the national curriculum, although most do. The academy trust sets the admissions policy and employs staff. May have sponsors such as businesses, universities, faith groups, etc.
- **Faith:** Can choose what they teach in religious studies. May have different criteria for admissions and staffing. Anyone can apply for a place.
- **Foundation:** The governing body employs the staff, commonly owns the land and buildings and is responsible for admissions
- **Special:** Separate for students with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) on an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who are not accommodated in the mainstream setting.

Independent Schools charge fees/tuition for attendance and are not funded by the government. They do not have to follow the national curriculum, but must be registered by the government. They are inspected regularly, but not necessarily by OFSTED. Boarding may be available and they typically have smaller student:teacher ratios. Keep in mind that more money does not always mean more quality, so be sure to read the inspection reports.

### Other Things to Consider

- Every child and family is different and what works for one may not be a good choice for another. Even the most popular schools are not right for everyone. Do your research and make the best choice for your child based on their needs!
- Each school has a prospectus outlining the school's curriculum, facilities, extra-curricular activities and policies. Most are available to view on the school's website.
- Students will be supplied with exercise books in which to write their work. UK paper size varies slightly from the US standard 8 ½ x 11 and is longer and narrower (known as A4)
- Most British schools will not cover much of American history.
- Law prohibits the video-recording of any children during school performances or events. Photographs may be permitted. Talk with the school about their policies on this.
- Most schools limit the types of food that can be brought in and will not allow sweets, candy or nuts.
- It is commonly accepted that Key Stage 1 students in primary school of both sexes can change for PE in the same classroom.
- You and your child will have to make adjustments to and from the British education system. Do your research and ask questions to be prepared. If at all possible, visit the school prior to selection to see the facilities and teachers in action. Get involved with the school and your child's education and don't ever be afraid to speak up if you need clarification, have concerns or questions.
- Though we both speak English, Americans and British do not speak the same language. Some everyday terms are very different!

<b>British</b>	<b>American</b>	<b>British</b>	<b>American</b>
PE Kit	Gym bag	Cellotape	Scotch tape
Jumper	Sweater	Fizzy drink	Soda
Trousers	Pants	Crisps	Potato chips
Pants	Underwear	Chips	French fries
Rubber	Eraser	Biscuit	Cookie
Wellies, Wellingtons	Rubber/Rain boots	Sweets	Candy
Plaster	Band-Aid, bandage	Squash	Juice

The School Liaison Office is here to support you and your child as you navigate this transition. It can be intimidating and confusing, but you are not alone! Do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns. If we don't have the answer, we know where to find it!



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