

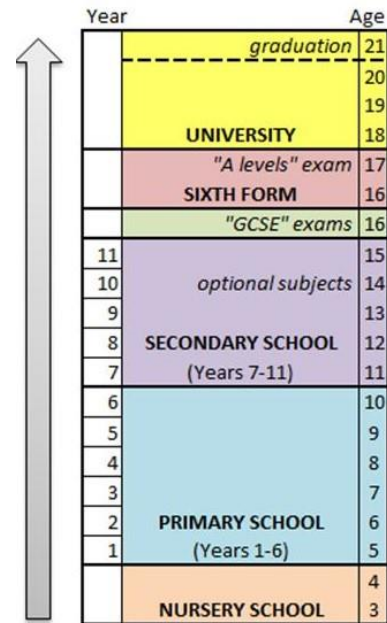
# Guide to the British education system

***Your Employee Wellbeing is dedicated to helping families find the best advice, support and care for their family members from babies to grandparents and all the years in between. Expert services include childcare and eldercare advice and searches, nanny recruitment and employment support through contracts and payroll.***

The British School system is made up of two sectors, government funded schools known as “state” schools, which are free for children to attend, and the privately funded schools known as independent or “private” schools, which are fee paying.

Delivery of British education is then broken down into separate sectors of learning, known as Key Stages. Key stages 1 and 2 are taught state primary schools or independent pre-preparatory and preparatory schools between the ages of 4-11.

Key stages 3 and 4 are taught between the ages of 11 – 16 in state secondary schools and grammar schools and independent senior schools. Key stage 5 is taught at colleges and school sixth forms (state and private) between the ages of 16-18.



## State schools

Pros	Cons
Usually within walking distance of homes so easy to access and get to	Larger class sizes
It is free and does not cost families any money to attend.	Limited specialist teachers
As schools are local, students tend to live near one another and strong friendships can be formed and supported.	Does not prepare for 11+ entrance into selective schools

<p>Whilst preferences are taken into account when applying, there is no guarantee of placement at your chosen school and families are subject to the council's decision as to where they will end up.</p>	<p>Catchment areas and feeder schools may mean you do not get into your closest school</p>
<p>Uniforms are generally simple and widely available to purchase from high street retailers</p>	<p>Grammar schools are few and far between and are hard to get into without extensive coaching/tutoring for all but the most academic children</p>
<p>Some secondary schools specialise in subjects which play to pupils' strengths, for example science and maths, music and drama.</p>	
<p>Grammar schools offer a selective state option, with pupils sitting entrance exams</p>	

## Admissions

Your local council is responsible for receiving applications to state schools. You are advised to check the admission criteria for all the schools locally and visit them all. In some cases where there is a particularly popular school there would be very little chance of receiving a place if you live outside the catchment area. It is always worth checking how places were allocated in the previous year. It will give you an idea if you may get a place.

If you live in a very urban area with lots of families, you will all be vying for the same places and it can become the hot topic of conversation. In more rural areas, if you are willing to drive to get to your favourite school there is a much better chance of getting a place as they are often undersubscribed, with some primary schools operating with as few as 50 pupils.

Most state schools follow similar admissions policies. Academy schools are able to set their own admission criteria, but they cannot be selective. For primary schools, applications open in the October/November of the year before Reception starts, and close on January 15<sup>th</sup> the year the child starts school. Offers are made on April 16 each year.

You must apply for at least three schools and the council will review all applications in relation to their criteria and provide a place for each child.

Applications for secondary schools must be made by October 31<sup>st</sup> and offers are made on March 1<sup>st</sup> the year the child is due to start.

It is important to note that every child is entitled to a state education, but there is no guarantee it will be at the school of your choosing. Should you be unhappy with the result of your application your local council will have an appeals process which you can follow.

## Private schools

Pros	Cons
Small class sizes	Often rely on parental transport or school bus as probably not local
Specialist schools are available to suit your child's strengths	Children must pass admission tests/exams to attend at all ages
Reputation that the teaching is superior	You have to pay fees for your child to attend
Prep pupils potentially receive favourable entry to private senior schools.	Potentially long waiting lists
Advice is given to prep pupils on suitable senior schools	Reputation of hot-housing and lack of pastoral care in favour of results
Pupils are prepared well for entrance exams when moving from prep to senior school	Add-on costs require consideration. Bespoke uniforms, multiple sports kits and compulsory school meals can add up
Statistically, private school pupils are more likely to be high flyers	
Scholarships and bursaries maybe available to help less affluent pupils attend	

## **Admissions**

Many areas have a plethora of prep schools. Most have small classes, specialist teachers and a relatively biddable intake – and rural ones often have acres of grounds. They will prepare your child for entrance exams to secondary schools and advise on which are likely to be most suitable. Don't assume the teaching is superior to a state school – both sectors include those who would be better off in a different profession. But a prep school is judged at least partly by its leavers' destinations, so it will do its best to ensure your child moves on to a decent secondary school, even if it has to dampen down your expectations.

Independent secondaries range from the ferociously selective power-houses such as Westminster and St Paul's to those that provide a gentle haven from hothousing or social integration – with admissions policies to match. A glance at the league tables will give a clue as to the degree of selection they operate.

Prep schools don't usually care where you live, as long as you can pay the fees although many London preps give the illusion, at least, that if you don't sign your child up at birth you are too late. Some selective schools do close their waiting lists early or have specific dates for registering; others operate on a first-come-first-served basis and do fill up on paper at least. But it is always worth a phone call; last-minute places come up at the most sought-after schools and many country preps welcome applicants at any stage.

The thought of putting your three or four-year-old through a selection session or two may seem crazy. Indeed, all-through schools (those with a senior school attached) that select this young rarely guarantee that a place at four will see you through into the senior school. Even those selected at seven or eight are sometimes weeded out at 11 or 13.

However, your child may have to go through it. At three, they may be asked to draw a picture, listen to a story and answer questions, cut out a circle, do a jigsaw, build a tower, match dominoes. Many schools send them out to play together, no doubt with an eye out to see who bites whom. Selection at this age is not an exact science, and certainly does not mean your child is doomed to failure because he didn't get a place at three.



At seven, eight and 11, most schools set maths and English exams, perhaps combined with reasoning tests. Many have previous papers on their websites. They will generally also interview likely candidates and ask their current school for a report and may include some sort of group activity.

Entry at 13 gets more complicated, with increasing numbers of schools setting pre-tests (generally maths, English and reasoning) in year 6 or 7. Those selected will usually need to confirm their places by doing well in the common entrance exam (in a range of subjects) in year 8. This system is tricky to navigate if your child is already in year 7 or 8, and you may need to track down one of the (dwindling number of) schools that don't use the pre-test system.

Many pupils change schools in the sixth form – whether from single sex to co-ed, boarding to day, state to private or vice versa. Some single sex schools admit pupils of the opposite gender into the sixth form. Both state and private schools almost always have some sort of entrance requirements at this point, generally involving GCSE grades, interviews and perhaps entrance exams.

**Your Employee Wellbeing has been making a difference to working parents and carers since 2011. If you would like to find out more about our bespoke childcare search services, to help you employ a nanny or find another form of childcare, please get in touch.**

**We will tailor a search for you in the area you specify and can include state or independent schools or a mixture of both. Included will be an overview of their admissions policies, Ofsted ratings and whether there are places available. Please get in touch for more information.**

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