



Education in the UK

Children who are European Economic Area (EEA) nationals can attend a UK state school and have the same rights to education as British citizens.

The educational system

The UK has various types of schools:

State schools

Maintained schools

Maintained schools are schools run by the local authority (or council).

Academies and free schools

Academies and free schools are publicly funded but have more control over their curriculum, school hours, term dates, and staff pay and conditions.

Grammar schools

Grammar schools select their pupils on the basis of academic ability (and can be Academies).

Some state schools are **faith schools** (schools with particular religious character or formal links with a religious organisation). Faith schools may give priority to applicants who are of the faith that they represent. However, state-funded faith schools must admit other applicants if they cannot fill all of their places.

Private schools

Private schools are independent of the state and charge fees.

Registering your child at a school

If you are a parent, you have a duty to make sure that your child receives education during the compulsory school age years. If you don't carry out this duty there are a number of measures that can be taken against you. This could include criminal legal action.



1. Choosing a school

In the UK, you can choose which school you would like to apply for. However, all schools have admission criteria to decide which children get places. Often, the size of the school, the current number of children who already live in the area and other factors will affect the council's ability to place your child at a particular school.

You can find out about schools in your area by contacting the local council or you can browse state schools here:

- **England:** <http://schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk/schoolsfinder>
- **Scotland:** <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/myschool/findaschool/>

Faith schools can have large catchment areas that overlap with other schools. They are open to pupils of all denominations, all faiths and none, but the way each school manages pupil intake can vary.

If your child has **additional support needs** the council has a duty to grant your request for a place in a specified school, except in certain circumstances that must be explained to you in writing.

2. Admission criteria

Admission criteria are different for each school. For example, schools may give priority to children:

- who have a brother or sister at the school already
- who live close to the school
- from a particular religion (for faith schools)
- who do well in an entrance exam (for selective schools, e.g. grammar schools or stage schools)
- in care or being looked after (all schools must have this as a top priority).

Admissions criteria for schools must be made available to you by either your council or your school and should explain how to apply.

3. Applying

You can apply to your local council for a school place.

You can apply at any point during the school year. If your child is about to start school or will be transferring to senior or secondary school, applications open on different days in each local council area - usually at the start of the autumn term of the year before your child is due to start school.

Private schools have their own admissions procedures. Apply directly if you want to send your child to a private school.

Deadlines

England

- You must apply for a primary school place by 15 January.
- You must apply for a secondary school place by 31 October.

When you fill in the form (online or on paper) you'll be asked to list the schools you're applying for in order of preference. You must apply for at least 3 schools.



To get a copy of the application form on paper, contact your local council.

Scotland

Enrolment week for your child's primary or secondary school place is in November.

To apply for a school place:

- **in your catchment area** - complete an enrolment form and return it to the school you are applying to during enrolment week in November.
- **at a school which is not in your catchment area** - make a placement request.

The school you are applying to will require a copy of your child's birth certificate and evidence of where you live.

4. When you'll find out

In **England**, councils will send confirmations for:

- primary schools on 16 April
- secondary schools on 1 March.

In **Scotland** the offer day will vary depending on when your child is due to start school. You will be informed of your offer date by your council.

The UK education path

Age 3-4

In the UK, many children start their education aged 3 or 4 by attending a nursery school, playgroup or the reception or nursery class of a primary school. This education is **not compulsory**.

Age 5-16

Full-time education is **compulsory** for all UK children and teenagers between the ages of 5 and 16. All UK children are entitled to and must be offered a free place at a state school between these ages if an application is made.

- **Primary education** is for children aged 4 or 5 up to 11 or 13.

You might hear them called primary schools, infant schools, junior schools, middle schools, pre-preparatory (pre-prep) schools and preparatory (prep) school.

- **Secondary education** is for pupils aged 11 or 13 to 16.

You might hear them called secondary schools, high schools, senior schools or grammar schools.

Age 16 and over

After the end of compulsory education, students might enter further education and then higher education.



Levels

	England	Curriculum stages in England	Scotland
Age 4-5	Reception	Foundation Stage	Primary 1 /P1 (Early level)
Age 5-6	Year 1	Key Stage 1	Primary 2 /P2 (First level)
Age 6-7	Year 2		P3 (First level)
Age 7-8	Year 3	Key Stage 2	P4 (First level)
Age 8-9	Year 4		P5 (Second level)
Age 9-10	Year 5		P6 (Second level)
Age 10-11	Year 6		P7 (Second level)
Age 11-12	Year 7	Key Stage 3	S1 (Third/Fourth level)
Age 12-13	Year 8		S2 (Third/Fourth level)
Age 13-14	Year 9		S3 (Third/Fourth level)
Age 14-15	Year 10	Key Stage 4	S4 (Senior phase)
Age 15-16	Year 11		S5 (Senior phase)
A-Levels and SCE Highers – not compulsory			
Age 16-17	Year 12	Key Stage 5	S6 (Senior phase)
Age 17-18	Year 13		

For Scotland, this is a simplified guide as children will move through the levels (and different subjects) at their own pace. There are stages; the Curriculum for Excellence runs progressively from age 3 to 18.

Examinations and qualifications

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

GCSEs

GCSE exams are usually taken by Year 11 pupils (age 14 to 15). The GCSE course last for two years and is a mixture of practical and examination work. Pupils normally take between eight and ten subjects.

A S Levels

A S Level exams take place at the end of year 12 (ages 16 to 17). They count towards A Levels taken the following year. Students will normally take four and sometimes five A S Levels.



A Levels

A Levels are the final exams in secondary schools. They are used by universities and future employers to decide which students to offer courses or jobs to. Most students take three A Level courses and a General Studies A Level.

Scotland

In Scotland, students take Standard Grade exams at the age of 16. In years 12 and 13 they take Highers and Advanced Highers (similar to A S Levels and A Levels).

Fees

State schools must provide **free education** and cannot charge for any activity (or materials, books, exam entry fees or equipment in connection with the activity) which is an essential part of the curriculum and takes place mainly during school hours.

The rules on when a charge can be made are very complicated and you should consult an experienced adviser, for example, at a **Citizens Advice Bureau**.

Term dates

- The English school year begins at the **start of September** and ends in the **third week of July**.
- The Scottish school year begins in the **third week of August** and ends in **mid to late June**.

Holidays during term time

If you want to take your child out of school during term time you must apply in advance to the head teacher. In most circumstances, schools **will not authorise family holidays during term time**. However, they may do so in exceptional circumstances, for example, when a family needs to spend time together following a crisis. If you take your child out of school without permission, action could be taken against you.

Pupils are allowed time off school to celebrate **major religious occasions**, even if they also attend the school's acts of collective worship. It is best to inform the school, in advance and in writing.

Food at school

All schools must provide free facilities for pupils to eat in the middle of the day. This could be a packed lunch or a meal provided by the school.

The school must provide food and drink that meets government standards aimed at making the meals healthier. Schools are not allowed to provide sweets and chocolates, high fat savoury snacks such as crisps and deep fried foods more than three times a week.

Drinking water must also be provided, free of charge at all times, including meal times. Bread must be available every day at mealtimes.

Schools should provide special diets if your child needs one, for example, for medical or religious reasons.



If you are concerned about the quality of the food that is provided in your child's school you should contact the school in the first instance.

General appearance and uniform

Some schools have rules about a pupil's general appearance. For example, pupils may not be allowed to wear make-up or jewellery, or clothing such as jeans and hoodies. A school can have a policy on general appearance as long as it is reasonable and does not discriminate on grounds of sex or race. You can find out what the school's policy is by asking the head teacher.

School uniform

The **law is not specific** about school uniforms but any school policy must be reasonable and not discriminate against children because of race, sex, sexuality, disability or religion and human rights.

If a school has a uniform it must provide information on its policy.

If you do not want your child to wear the school's preferred uniform, they cannot be disciplined for not wearing it. If, however, your child simply refuses to wear the school uniform, the school can discipline them if it thinks that academic or disciplinary problems might be caused by the refusal.

Illness

If your child cannot attend school because of sickness or injury, the local education authority must arrange suitable education. This may be in hospital schools or hospital teaching units, or tuition at home.

When a child is admitted to hospital, their educational needs should be assessed as soon as possible after admission. All children admitted to hospital for more than five working days have a right to properly planned education.

If your child is absent from school for 15 or more consecutive working days, the education authority may assess their needs. The school may then provide work for the child to do at home. The education authority may provide home visiting teachers.

Pregnancy and maternity

It is against the law to discriminate against a student because she is pregnant or has had a baby within the previous 26 weeks. For example, she should not be prevented from attending school because she is pregnant. The school may have to consider providing alternative education if the pregnancy prevents her from attending school.

Sex education

All schools are expected to provide sex education. You should be consulted about the school's sex education programme and you should take up any concerns with the head teacher.



You are entitled to withdraw your child from all or part of the sex education programme if you wish, but not from lessons in the general curriculum which relate to aspects of reproduction, sex, sexuality and morality.

Exclusion

Exclusion from school is a serious sanction and should only be used by a school as a last resort.

A pupil can be excluded from school if they are persistently breaking school rules or their behaviour is seriously disrupting order and discipline and the education of other pupils.

Any removal from school must follow a set procedure. Parents must be told on the day the decision is made and a meeting must be arranged with you.

You have a right to appeal against your child's exclusion. Most young people over the age of 16 (12 in Scotland) also have the right to appeal. The Government issues guidance which schools and councils must follow when managing school exclusions.

While a pupil is excluded, the local education authority still has a duty to educate the child. It must arrange for the pupil to receive suitable education, either at another school or educational unit or at home. These arrangements should be put in place within 10 days of the exclusion (six days of the exclusion in England).

Complaining about a school

Contact your local council or call your local police on 101 if you think a child is in danger.

To make complain about a **state school**, follow these steps in order. Only move on to the next step if your complaint is not resolved.

1. Follow the **school's complaints procedure** - every school in England and Scotland must have one.
2. Complain in writing to the headteacher.
3. Complain in writing to the school's governing body.
4. Complain to the Department for Education (DfE) if you live in England.

Schools may not consider complaints about behaviour that happens outside the school's hours or premises.

Other types of complaint

For some types of complaint you need to contact a different agency.

Complaint	Who to contact
Child protection	Local council
Criminal behaviour	Police
Data protection	Information Commissioner's Office
Discrimination	Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)
Employment	An employment tribunal
Exam malpractice and maladministration	Ofqual and the awarding body



Complaint	Who to contact
Quality of education or leadership	Ofsted

Legal advice

You can get free legal advice about schooling and education from:

- Child Law Advice in England on ☐ 0300 330 5485

Scottish Child Law Centre in Scotland on ☐ 0131 667 6333

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