



Learning in England & Understanding Education in Schools in England

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You would have to understand the history to grasp why schools in England are as they are! This article gives you the vocabulary and an explanation of the school system in England. [It is different in other parts of the UK.]

Independent, private, fee-paying schools

On the beautiful graphic on the next page you can see that there are two columns of bookshelves. The one on the left of the door is narrow, to represent the smaller proportion of children in England and Wales, who attend Independent Schools - about 7% of children. These are fee-paying schools. Many are old and traditional, with amazing buildings and grounds. They have a Christian foundation. Most of the schools will be mixed day schools; but some will provide education for boys or girls and some will have boarding facilities.

As you can see from the left-hand bookcase, the children referred to on the bottom shelf are the youngest: Independent School children in their younger years, between 5 and 11 years old are in Junior Schools. Sometime in Year 6 the children apply for entrance into Year 7 or First Year, in a Senior School. Each Senior School will run its own entrance examination

Move up a shelf on the infographic: there are a few independent Prep or Preparatory Schools which prepare children for Senior Schools. These take children aged 8 to 13. At the age of 13, in the summer term, children undertake the Common Entrance examination.

Children may join the Senior School in the First Year, aged 11 or Third Year - after Common Entrance, aged 13. They will start the two-year GCSE courses in the Fourth Year and do the examinations in May and June of the Fifth Year.

The top shelf shows the Sixth Form: the two-year A level courses are done in the Sixth Form – Lower and Upper Sixth with examinations in May and June of the Upper Sixth Year.



Maintained or State-funded schools

The bookshelves on the right of the door are wider to represent the number of children in State-funded education. 93% or so of the children in England and Wales go to State-funded schools. These schools are required to follow the National Curriculum. Children will usually go to their local school, the nearest to where they live. If you want to attend a different school from your nearest, and there is space, then you may have to move to be in the 'catchment' area.

The shelves at the bottom, again represent the youngest children in Reception, while the ones at the top, represent the oldest.

The second and third shelves up represent the Primary section of school with KS1 when the academic learning begins with the 3rs: reading, writing and 'rithmetic; and KS2 with projects and subject work.

In KS1 and 2 children are in Primary or Junior schools. They have a form teacher and most of their lessons will be with that person. All schools will have subject specialists in Science or Music, or Art, or PE, so as the children get older, they may have specialist teachers coming to teach in their form room. Children in State-funded education must undertake SATs or Standard Assessment Tests in the summer term at the end of Year 6, aged 11.

When you are 11 you move up, or transition into Secondary School for KS3, starting in Year 7. This is a big change! Though children are in forms, their teachers are based in subject areas. So, the children move from room to Studio to Lab. to Sports Hall and to the great outdoors.

KS4 is for children of 14-16 who are following two-year courses, examined by GCSEs in the summer term at the end of Year 11;

The top shelf refers to the stage for the oldest children: KS5 for 17-18 year olds who also follow two year courses, examined by A Levels, BTECs and NVQs. They are in Years 12 and 13.

Places for University, Apprenticeships and other training begin in the next academic year after these final school assessments: A Levels, BTECs and NVQs. Some students will take a year out of formal education or training, calling it a Gap Year.

This is all shown on the next page in table form, with State-funded schools [on the right of the bookshelf with grey background], and Independent Schools [on the left bookshelf with purple background]. The lightest tone represents the youngest children and darkest tone the oldest children.



Levels	Age in September	Maintained schools - by Year Group	Key stage	Maintained schools – by stage	Independent day schools – by Year Group	Independent day schools - by stage	Boarding schools	Independent Colleges	University
Level 7	21 and above								Masters/ or Apprenticeship or Technical Training
Level 5 and 6	19-20								Second and Third Year of Undergraduate Course and some Diplomas/ or Apprenticeship or Technical Training
Level 4	18								First Year of Undergraduate Course/or Apprenticeship or Technical Training
Level 3	Assessment: A LEVEL/INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE/BTEC Nationals/T LEVEL/ Music Grades 6,7,8								
	17	13	5	Secondary	13	Senior	Sixth Form	Sixth Form	
	16	12	5	Secondary	12	Senior	Sixth Form	Sixth Form	
Level 2	Assessment: GCSEs grades 9,8,7,6,5,4 or A*, A, B, C / BTEC firsts/Level 2 NVQ Music Grades 4,5								
Level 1	Assessment: GCSEs grades 3,2,1 OR D,E,F/ BTEC /Level 1 NVQ/ Music Grades 1,2,3								
	15	11	4	Secondary	11	Senior	5 th year		
	14	10	4	Secondary	10	Senior	4 th year		
	13	9	3	Secondary	9	Senior	3 rd year		
							Common Entrance		
	12	8	3	Secondary	8	Senior	Prep		
	11	7	3	Secondary	7	Senior	Prep		
	Assessment: 11+/SATS				Own Entry Examination				
	10	6	2	Primary	6	Junior	Prep		
	9	5	2	Primary	5	Junior	Prep		
	8	4	2	Primary	4	Junior	Prep		
	7	3	2	Primary	3	Junior	Prep		
	6	2	1	Infant	2	Junior	Pre-Prep.		
	5	1	1	Infant	1	Junior	Pre-Prep.		
	4	Reception		Infant					
	0-5	Early years/Nursery/ Foundation		Infant					



Key/Glossary

Grey – State-funded provision. Schools may also be called maintained schools as they are maintained financially by the Local Education Authority

Purple – fee paying provision – Independent Schools

No colour in the background above – these are points of assessment or information relevant in both the State and Independent sectors.

Academic year	Early September in each year to mid-July in the following year. Public examinations: GCSEs and A Levels are held over May and June each year. There are three terms each with a one or two-week half-term break: • Autumn or Michaelmas from September to December • Spring or Hilary from January to March • Summer or Trinity from April to July. There are also two short breaks or ‘holidays’ of two or three weeks around Christmas with New Year; and Easter; and the summer holidays of five to seven weeks. Independent Schools have longer holidays. Sometimes schools number the terms. So • Term 1 - September - October half term • Term 2 – November - December • Term 3 - January - February half term • Term 4 – end February - March • Term 5 – April - May half term • Term 6 – June - mid-July.
Academy	A school which is funded by the State, run by a governing body, with no control from the Local Education Authority and having some freedom in the way it is run. They will be bound by the National Curriculum. There are quite a number of schools which are run in groups – both primary and secondary - with a shared headteacher. Groups of schools may be run through a Multi-Academy Trust.
A Level	Advanced Level examinations. Pupils will choose three subjects, to study in the Sixth Form/Year 12 and 13. [Some may choose four, for example, Further Maths if already undertaking Maths. Whether to do three or four will depend on school policy and the requirements of the University to which the pupils may want to apply, to study at undergraduate Level]. Examinations in a wide range of subjects taken by pupils in their last year of Secondary/Senior education, generally taken in a school which is an Examination Centre. The results are very important to the Universities, Colleges and apprentice-providers in determining whether to offer a place for undergraduate

	study. The highest mark is an A*; and the lowest mark, to pass, is E. Paths to Learning has an Information Document on Choosing A Levels and can advise parents and pupils on which subjects to choose.
Apprenticeship	An apprentice is trained by an employer, while he or she is in paid employment and should be given at least one day a week, away from the workplace, to study and obtain a professional qualification. Apprenticeships can last between 1 and 4 years. Paths to Learning has an Information Document on Apprenticeships.
Assessment	Formal and ‘public’ examinations, such as GCSEs and A Levels which are set eg by the university examination boards such as AQA, EdExcel, OCR, WJEC, for GCSE and A Level. SATs are State-run Standard Assessment Tests in English, Maths and Science which pupils undertake at the end of Year 2 and the end of Year 6 to ascertain the Levels they have reached.
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council - a Further Education qualification and vocational qualification taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The qualification is equivalent to A-Levels. BTEC Nationals are Level 3 vocational qualifications that provide specialist, work-related learning in a range of sectors. BTEC Firsts allow Level 2 learners to develop their knowledge and understanding by applying their learning and skills in a work-related context. Paths to Learning has an Information Document on BTECs
Bursary	A financial award made to a pupil based on a means’ test which enables him or her to attend an Independent School.
Common Entrance	The Common Entrance examination is a standard form of assessment based on a common syllabus, run by the Independent Schools Examinations Board. Children aged 12, who will be going to an Independent [public or private fee-paying] School sit the examination at their Prep Schools in early June. Papers are marked by the Prep Schools. The results are submitted to the chosen Independent School. The head teacher of the Independent School is most likely to want to interview the pupil and to have a reference from the head teacher of the Prep School.
Community schools	Schools which are controlled by the Local Education Authority and not influenced or sponsored by any business or religious groups.

Early years [EYFS]	The Early Years' Foundation Stage sets standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. All schools must follow the EYFS including Child Minders, Pre-Schools, Nurseries and Reception Classes.
Eleven plus	The eleven-plus (11-plus or 11+) is an examination taken by some pupils in England in their last year of primary education, which governs admission to Grammar Schools and other Secondary Schools, which use academic selection. The examination is called 11+ because children who pass it at the end of Year 6 will enter a Grammar or selective school to start in Year 7 [aged 11] in September. It is used in very few counties in England.
English Baccalaureate [EBacc]	This is a combination of subjects that GCSE pupils should cover: • English Language and Literature • Maths • the Sciences • Geography or History • a Language Pupils should achieve 5,6,7,8 or 9 in each of the subjects to achieve the EBacc. Paths to Learning has an Information Document on the EBacc.
Examination Board	Awarding bodies include AQA, EdExcel, OCR, WJEC who administer the public examinations at GCSE and A Level. Schools choose the Boards for each subject.
Extended Project Qualification [EPQ]	A project undertaken by students, usually in the Lower Sixth or Year 12 which complements their choice of A Level subjects. It can contribute the equivalent to half an A Level in the UCAS tariff. See our Information Document on the EPQ. If a school is unable to support a pupil in doing an EPQ, Paths to Learning is able to provide a supervisor and register an Exam Centre. Contact Paths to Learning for more information.
Extra-Curricular Activities	These are activities outside the school timetable conducted in lunch hours or after school, for example in Sport or the Arts, which develop wide-ranging skills that are not publicly assessed eg by GCSEs or A Levels Paths to Learning has an Information Document on Extra-Curricular or Co-Curricular Activities.
Faith School	A school which is supported by a recognised religious group, for example: Church of England, Methodist, Roman Catholic; Muslim or Jewish. Paths to Learning has an Information Document on Faith Schools.

Fees	Fees are payable at the beginning of each term, less for younger children and more for older children. Day school fees for Junior School Children will be in the order of £5,000 a term and for Senior children up to £8,000 a term. Boarding school fees will be between £13,000 and £17,000 per term. Schools vary in what they charge for extras. Paths to Learning would research this in detail for you.
Foundation Schools	Foundation Schools and Voluntary Schools are schools which have more freedom to manage the way they run their schools than Community Schools.
Free schools	These schools are State-funded but set up by parents or an organisation. They have freedom from some regulation.
Gap Year	Some pupils leave school and plan to defer their entry to University or training so they can earn some money, learn a language, travel, or undertake some training that will complement their future studies. There are many interesting opportunities and organisations which support a young person wanting to make the most of the time. Paths to Learning can offer guidance and advice. Please see our Information Document on Gap Years.
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education examination[s] studied through KS4 when pupils are in Years 10 and 11 /fourth and fifth form. An academic qualification, taken in a school which is an Examination Centre, in a number of subjects in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, at age 16. Examinations are marked by subject specialist teachers. They cannot mark the papers of their own pupils. Each GCSE qualification is in a particular subject, and stands alone, but a group of examinations [between 8 and 14] are sat at the age of 16. The highest mark is 9; and the lowest mark, to pass is 5, [formerly A*-C] Most schools require pupils to achieve a minimum of 5 examinations at 9-5 [A*-C] in order to continue with A Level studies; and to have achieved 9-7 [A*-B] in the actual subjects they chose to study at A Level. Paths to Learning has Information Documents on Choosing GCSEs and a typical timetable for a KS4 pupil.
Grammar School	A secondary school run by the Local Education Authority, a foundation body or a trust. Pupils will be selected based on academic ability. Pupils must pass the 11+ to gain a place in a Grammar School. There are very few Grammar Schools in England now.

Homework or Prep	Homework is set by the subject teachers to help pupils to develop skills in independent learning and to check they have understood what was addressed in lessons. Prep is work done in preparation for the next lesson. Older children will be expected to undertake two to four hours of homework or independent study each weekday.
Independent School	A 'private' or 'public' school, where parents pay fees. About 7% of children in England and Wales attend an Independent School.
Infant School	A school for children in Reception, Years 1 and 2, aged between 4 and 7.
International Baccalaureate- UK [IB]	The International Baccalaureate is a Diploma programme run in 100 schools nationwide. It is run during the Sixth Form as an alternative to A Levels. Pupils study six subjects [three at higher Level, and three at standard Level]. In addition, they must do Theory of Knowledge [TOK]; an extended essay; and 150 hours of Creativity, Activity and Service [CAS] outside the classroom. Pupils can be awarded a maximum of 45 points and a minimum of 24 points to achieve the Diploma. Paths to Learning offers advice on whether to undertake IB or A Levels. Please see our Information Document and contact us for more information.
Junior School	Usually an Independent School for pupils aged 5-11.
Key Stage	There are five Key Stages in the English school system: KS1 – Years 1 and 2 KS2 – Years 3 through to 6 KS3 – Years 7 through to 9 KS4 – Years 10 and 11 [GCSE years] KS5 – Years 12 and 13 [Sixth Form, A Level or IB Diploma years]
Learning Support	Provision made for children who have a specific learning need such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia. Learning support may be given by a specialist with the child [1:1] in dedicated rooms at the school; or in lessons with a specialist teacher alongside the subject teacher. Paths to Learning offers advice on the provision of Learning Support. Contact us for more information. Also please see our Information Document on Learning Support.
Maintained School	A school which is funded by the State. It may be an Academy or Free School, a Comprehensive or Grammar School. Historically the Local Education Authority will have played a significant role in the management of maintained schools. In order to attend such a school you have to live in the catchment area. Applications are made through the Local Education Authority. About 93% of children in England and Wales attend a maintained school.

	Paths to Learning offers advice on applications to Maintained Schools. Contact us for more information.
National Vocational Qualification [NVQ]	At Level 2 an NVQ is the equivalent to four or more GCSEs undertaken in one year At Level 3 an NVQ is the equivalent to two or more A Levels undertaken in two years. They are undertaken as a work-based qualification in subjects such as Health and Social Care; Health and Safety; and Business and Management.
OFSTED/ISI	These are the inspection agencies that check schools are complying with the law. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills inspects State-funded or maintained schools; while the Independent Schools Inspectorate inspects Independent Schools.
Preparatory/Prep school	A school, sometimes single sex, for pupils aged 7-13, often with a boarding facility, in the Independent sector.
Pre-prep school	The equivalent school to an Infant School in the Independent sector.
Primary School	A State-funded school for children in Years 1 through to Year 6.
Private School	An independent fee-paying school for children of any age
Public School	An independent fee-paying boarding school for children aged between 11 or 13 and 18 eg Eton
Reception	The year for children aged four who may attend school, before they enter Primary Education.
Scholarship	An award or honour made in recognition of academic or other ability, sometimes accompanied with a financial award or reduction of fees. Schools may also award scholarships or exhibitions for musical, or artistic or sporting excellence.
Senior School	Usually an Independent School for pupils aged 11-18
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Each Local Education Authority will assess and address the needs of children under 18 in its area.
Special Schools	Schools for children aged 11 or more to support the learning of children with Special Educational Needs in relation to: • communication and interaction • cognition and learning

	• social, emotional and mental health • sensory and physical needs for example being blind, deaf or having a physical disability The Special School will be adapted to meet the needs of the pupils. Paths to Learning offers advice on applications to Special Schools. Contact us for more information.
Timetable	Schools may draw up their own programme or timetable of lessons. Most schools will have lessons of between 40 minutes and one hour long. Maintained schools usually start the day between 8.30 and 9.00 with five or six lessons a day and ending before 4.00pm; while Independent Schools will start at 8.30 too, with 8-12 lessons and finish between 4.00 and 7.00 pm. Some boarding schools also have timetabled lessons on a Saturday morning. Clubs for extra-curricular activities are wide ranging from sports to debating, computing, music and art and are intended to develop skills that may not be developed in the classroom. They may be held in lunch hours or after school and sometimes even at weekends. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is offered by many schools as such an extra-curricular activity. Also please see our Information Document on Extra-Curricular or Co-Curricular Activities.
University	A tertiary institution offering undergraduate and post graduate courses, for which a student will have to pay fees. Paths to Learning offers advice on applications to University. Contact us for more information.
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is the organisation which offers advice and guidance about all the options open to school leavers and processes all applications for students undertaking undergraduate and other courses. Also please see our Information Document on Applying to University.



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