

Understanding the British School System



As a member of the U.S. visiting forces or as a civilian employee of the Department of Defense, you are entitled to use the British state school system, free of charge. The vast majority of American families have a very positive experience in the British educational system, but you should be aware that there are some significant differences between the UK and the US school systems. For instance, children are placed according to their age group and not tested for placement by skill level or previous years of completed education.

THE BRITISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

The School Year:

The school year runs from September to July and is divided into three terms. The autumn term runs from September to December, the Spring term runs from January to March and the Summer term runs from April to July. Each term lasts approximately 12 weeks. Each term is broken up with a half term break which lasts about one week.

There are also holidays (vacations) at Christmas and Easter time lasting approximately two weeks each and the summer holiday is around 6 weeks long.

Catchment Areas:

Most children attend school in their immediate local area, providing there is space. This school is called the catchment school. Every school serves an area of streets or villages, but sometimes this is different for church schools. Parents have a right to ask for a place at a different school. This is called a 'preferred' school. This means that you can send your child to a well-performing school some distance away, even if you are not living in the catchment area. However, it may not be possible to obtain a place if the preferred school is full - this is the overriding factor.

If your catchment area school is full then the education office will find you a place at the

- next nearest school. Schools are not able to vary the government's regulations on class sizes.

Registering:

Members of the US Visiting Forces are entitled to use the British state school system free of charge. Under this system, the Local Education Authority (LEA) is obliged to find a

school place for anyone living in their county.

Schools with a good reputation often get filled up quickly, and each school has a maximum number of students that it is able to accept. You will need to enroll your child with a school to secure a place. Please check with the County Council to verify enrollment dates. Schools also have a number of criteria for how it selects its students, and these will usually be based on proximity to the schools, siblings at the school and any special educational needs. Once a year group is full, the school should not accept additional students into that year group. It is possible, therefore, that those families with more than one child may be able to get a place at their local school for one child but not all of their children. As stated above, if your first choice school is full, the LEA is obliged to find a school place elsewhere which may be some distance away.

The Appeal System:

If you have not been allocated a place at your first choice of school, you are able to make an Appeal using the schools appeal system. You need to complete a form with your family details, and reasons why you think your child should be offered a place at your chosen school, even though the school is full. Once completed, the forms should be sent to the Local Education Authority who will schedule a date for you to put your case before an Appeal panel. The members of the Appeal panel are independent to the school, and will decide whether the school should offer your child a place based on the reasons you have given. The decision of the Appeals panel is final.

Pre-school/Nursery

Many children from age 2 1/2 to four years of age attend pre-school/nursery. There is no curriculum at this level, although there is a set of desirable learning objectives. All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free early education for 38 weeks per year through nursery, pre-school, or an accredited child minder. This applies until they reach the compulsory school age. Children enter school the September after their fourth birthday. This is commonly known as reception. For more information on pre-school choices in the local area or information on the early education program please contact your local county council website or the School Liaison Officer.

Primary Schools:

Primary schools are for children aged 4-11 years. This may also be referred to as Key Stage 1 (ages 4 to 7) and Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11). The first class in primary school is usually called the Reception Class, and each child automatically moves to the next higher class at the end of the school year. The subjects to be taught at primary schools are specified by the National Curriculum, which also sets out Standard Attainment Targets (SAT's) to be reached. Pupils are tested on SAT's at 7 and 11 years old, at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, in the compulsory core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science. Other subjects, including History, Geography, Technology, Music, Art and Physical Education are also taught. Details of these are found in the individual school prospectuses.

For younger children, the subjects are often integrated into topics. It is recommended to visit

the primary schools of interest to give you an opportunity to see the school in action, meet the Head Teacher and talk to members of staff. This should give you a good feel for the schools in the local area, and help you decide which school is best for your child. Although all schools follow the same curriculum, there are subtle differences in the way in which the schools are run and extra-curriculum activities offered.

Applications for registration can usually be found at the schools themselves, or via the County Council websites.

Secondary Schools:

Between the ages of 11 and 18, children attend Secondary school, usually comprehensive schools where all abilities are taught. State secondary schools must follow the National Curriculum and assessment of the children takes place at Key Stage 3 (age 14) and Key Stage 4 (age 16). The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the principal means of assessment for 16 year olds. Many subjects include course work in addition to examinations in each individual subject.

Education for 16 to 18 year olds is referred to as Sixth Form, with the Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth. In the Lower Sixth, students study for AS level exams, usually in 3 or 4 subjects, leading on to A level exams (Advanced Level) usually in 3 subjects in the Upper Sixth. The usual reroute to university and college is through the A level system, depending on the grades attained in these examinations. The minimum age to leave school is age 18.

You may be able to apply to the school direct but it is recommended to apply to your local County Council. Admission to a British School is usually preceded by an interview with the Head Teacher. The student's previous academic record and birth certificate should be presented at the interview to assist in the school placement.

Private/Independent Schools:

Private or Independent schools are schools that are privately maintained by fees paid by parents. Often these schools offer boarding facilities for students as well as day school. This means that the school day is longer, and often includes Saturday school particularly for sports, but the school holidays are usually longer. These independent schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum and Standards Attainment Targets although most will follow the GCSE curriculum as this is a nationally recognized set of qualifications.

To register at a private school, you will need to apply with the school directly. The School Admissions Secretary will provide you with information about the school and the admissions process. Often your child will have to take an entrance exam prior to being accepted at the school, which will assess their current attainment level and help the school to place your child in the right class.

** Please take note that because RAF Croughton does not currently have a secondary school on base, NDSP will provide funding for your child to be homeschooled or attend a local Secondary, Private, or Independent school for grades 7-12. You need to register with NDSP and receive your acceptance letter before applying for your school of choice.**

	US Equivalent	Key Stage	School Year	Age of Child	Testing
PRIMARY	Pre-K	1	Reception	4-5	
	K	1	Year1	5-6	
	1	1	Year2	6-7	Key Stage 1 SAT's
	2	2	Year3	7-8	
	3	2	Year4	8-9	
	4	2	Year5	9-10	
	5	2	Year6	10-11	Key Stage 2 SAT's
SECONDARY	6	3	Year?	11-12	
	7	3	Year8	12-13	
	8	3	Year9	13-14	Key Stage 3 SAT's
	9	4	Year10	14-15	
	10	4	Year11	15-16	GCSE's
SIXTH	11	Lower Sixth	Year12	16-17	AS Level
FORM	12	Upper Sixth	Year 13	17-18	A Level

PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

The SchoolDay:

The school day is usually from around 8:45am to 3:00pm, with a lunch break around 12:00; however, each individual school sets its own times. Some schools provide a hot lunch, while others expect the children to bring a packed lunch. Morning sessions are divided by a short break or "playtime" when the children are expected to play outside, except in very bad weather. Young children also have a break during the afternoon session.

All schools are required to give religious education, but any child may be withdrawn from religious activities at their parents' request.

School Uniforms:

Many British schools have a uniform that all children are required to wear. This usually comprises of a grey skirt or trousers (pants), shirt, sweater or sweatshirt and perhaps a blazer and school tie. Different schools have their own school colors, and you can buy items of the school uniform directly from the school. However, many national retailers also stock the most common items. Schools usually also require a uniform for Physical Education (sports/PE kit), often shorts with a T-shirt and black trainers (tennis shoes/sneakers).

SchoolReports:

At the primary school age, school reports to the parents are usually written once a year and there are Parent Evenings held to discuss progress, once per term or three times per year. The report will focus on the progress of your child such as an overall attainment standard or on individual pieces of school work, but grades are not always given.

The school will administer SAT tests at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7) and Key Stage 2 (age 11). The school is required to submit their SAT's testing results to the Department of Education. The results are then entered into the national league tables of schools once per school year. The national league tables are published in the newspapers and are available from the County Council or the Department of Education. This means you can compare the results of one school versus another.

You may not receive as much information about your child's progress as you may be used to or expect. As a general rule in respect of a child's progress, "No news is good news." Report cards are only issued once per year in British primary schools and information about grading is infrequent.

If you, as the parent or guardian, have concerns about any aspect of school life, you should first speak to the class teacher, then send a note to the Head Teacher asking a specific question and lastly an appointment to discuss the issue. Often individual class teachers also have a "home book" for each child, where comments and concerns can be written by both the parents/guardians and the teachers.

SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

At the beginning of secondary school, students study a wide variety of subjects. However, one of the main differences between the British and American school systems is that the British students specialize in their chosen subjects much earlier. American students will probably find that their education is more broad based but less specialized than their British counterparts from age 15 onwards.

Up to end of Key Stage 3 (age 14), all students follow the same curriculum, which includes English, Mathematics, Science (Physics, Chemistry and Biology), History, Geography, Languages, ICT (Information and Computer Technology), Religious Education, Physical Education, Music, Drama, Art, Design and Technology (covering such topics as woodwork, metalwork, cookery, textiles, etc.) and PHSE (Personal, Social and Health Education).

Choosing Subject Options:

Towards the end of Year 9 (age 13-14), all students select usually around 10 subjects to study in more detail and drop all other subjects. Some of these subjects are compulsory, such as English, Mathematics and Science and others are selected by the student. These subjects are studied for the next two years (years 10 and 11) culminating in the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams at the end of Year 11. All GCSE subjects are a two year course and many of them involve course work throughout the two years as well as written exams at the end of the two years. As well the traditional subjects studied to date, students may also be able to choose other GCSE subject options such as Engineering or Business Studies.

American students arriving part way through the two year GCSE course will find it difficult to assimilate, as they will have missed some of the course content which will be included in the final examinations. They may also have missed some course work which makes up part of the final grade, and modular examinations which can take place throughout the two years.

Alternatively, those students that find themselves leaving in the middle of their GCSEs before completion may find difficulty in getting their grades assessed, as grades are not typically given until the final assessments are taken at the end of their GCSEs. There are a few Private Schools that have worked with us in the past. Please discuss this issue with any potential schools prior to registering if you project leaving during your child's GCSEs.

Starting in Year 12 students will move onto Sixth Form. Students usually study up to 4 subjects (in great detail) in their first year, called Lower Sixth. They will then specialize in usually 3 subjects in their second year, called Upper Sixth. These 3 subjects are studied to an advanced levels. Therefore, British students would be ahead of their American counterparts in these subjects only, while having a much a narrower based education in other general subjects.

At the end of Sixth Form, students leave school but can move on to the University system. Most university courses are 3 to 4 years in duration, and students will specialize in usually one subject only. There is not a general education year at the beginning of a university course and students will only attend lectures in their chosen course subject (s).

Keeping Informed of Your Child's Progress:

At secondary school age, you will receive one school report per term (three per year) detailing your child's progress. In addition, you will be invited to attend Parent's Evenings where you can discuss your child's progress with individual subject teachers.

Many secondary schools operate a Tutor (Homeroom) system. When your child starts at school, they will be placed into a Tutor Group, with a Form Tutor (Homeroom Teacher). The Form Tutor will gets to know the students assigned to them well, and is the first point of contact in the event of any problems.

HIGHER EDUCATION/ UNIVERSITY

Beyond sixth-form, is University. Entry requirements to most degree courses are three A-levels at grade E or above, and many require more qualifications than this. Applicants apply through a central clearinghouse, the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS), which all academic institutions offering degrees and higher education courses are members. Applicants may apply for a maximum of 6 courses or institutions. Applications are completed in the last year of A-Levels and submitted no later than Dec. 15, earlier for some courses and Oxford or Cambridge. Those who get no offers are matched to courses with vacancies.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT BRITISH SCHOOLS

- Discuss discipline policies with the Head Teacher when you register. Schools have a Behavior Policy in place and bullying is not tolerated at any age. Corporal punishment is banned from all state maintained schools.
- British school supply exercise books in which the children write their work. Paper size is different in the UK; it is known as A5 and is longer and narrower than US 8 1/2 x 11.
- When your child is enrolled in a British school, you automatically become a member of the PTA (Parent Teacher Association). This group raises funds to supplement the school budget with events such as table top sales, school fairs, quiz nights and other fund raising activities. Give it your support! It not only benefits the school but also gives you a good opportunity to get to know other parents.
- Generally, parents and Head Teachers all welcome the enrichment of the experience of American children in local schools, and there has been a warm relationship and appreciation of the opportunities that this offers to all involved.
- Note that your children will not have the American holidays, such as the 4th July, Thanksgiving etc. as days off at British schools. You will need to discuss your family requirements with the school, so that your child may be a part of American traditions and holidays when appropriate.
- Most British schools will not cover American history as a separate course, however, some aspects of American history may be covered in other courses. Although, Kingham Hill School does offer an American Studies program.
- A recent law in Britain prevents anyone from videotaping any children during school performances, although you may be allowed to take photographs. Check with the Head Teacher on the policy for their school.
- Check with the school on their policy for bringing snacks to school. Most schools only allow fruit, not sweets or candy.
- **Please give as much notice as possible when taking your children out of school. As soon as you have a PCS date, inform the school- don't just leave. This is very important as it enables the school to plan its acceptance numbers for the next term. You may prevent another child from being able to register if you do not keep the school informed.**
- There are many differences in the everyday language used by British and American children, and it is worth pointing out some differences to your child before they start school, to prevent any embarrassment. Here are some common differences, (and there are many others!):

British Term	US Term	British Term	US Term
PE kit	gym bag	biscuit	cookie
crisps	potato chips	sweets	candy fizzy
drink	soda	squash	drink
cellotape	scotch tape	plaster	band-aid
rubber	eraser	chips	trench fries
Wellingtons or wellies	rubber boots	trousers	pants

- It is accepted in British Primary schools that Key Stage 1 children of both sexes can change for PE in the same classroom.
- The term *school* in Britain normally refers to establishments which provide education for students between 5 and 18. It is not generally used to describe colleges or universities.
- Schools and nurseries are inspected regularly by OFSTED, and the results are published. These are available on-line so you can find out how well your chosen school is performing.
- You child will have to make adjustments going into the British education system as well as returning to the American system. As a parent, you will have to take into account changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and social and emotional differences. Hopefully, however, it will be a wonderful experience for your child, and educational in the widest sense of the word.

BEFORE YOU CHOOSE A SCHOOL:

There are many differences in the British and American school systems. If you are thinking about educating your child in the British school system, consider the following points:

- Talk to the SLO or CRA about how the British school system works, as it is very different to what you are used to, especially if you have teenage children. Don't send your child to the school your neighbor has chosen before finding out whether this is the best option for you.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification, help and advice from the school.
- Get a copy of all the relevant information to help you make the right decision for you and your child.
- Visit the local schools, meet the Head Teachers and read their prospectuses.
- Think about transport arrangements and ask at the schools - you will be responsible for transporting your child to a local British school, although a limited bus service may be available at some schools.
- Be aware that you will not receive as much information about your child's progress

as you may be used to. When you visit the school, ask the Head Teacher about the frequency of written reports and parent-teacher meetings.

- Ask the Head Teacher about what opportunities there will be to talk to your child's teacher, if you have anything to discuss.
- Get involved with your child's school - it will benefit you, your child and the school. Please feel free to contact either of us to assist with questions. Thank you!

Kristina Garo
Child and Youth Education Services
School Liaison
422 ABS/SLO
DSN: 314-236- 8097/Comm: 01280 708 097
Email: 422abg.school liaison@us.af.mil

