

## About the English Education System: Secondary Schools

Guidance for parents of children who use  
English as an Additional Language (EAL)



### What does this guidance cover?

Here you can find practical information to help you find a school place for your child and to understand the English Education System.

There are different types of schools in England, including some which parents have to pay for (i.e. *fee-paying/independent/private schools*).

This guidance tells you about English schools which you do not have to pay for (i.e. *state schools*). There are different kinds of state schools, including:

- *Local Authority (LA) schools* – funded by local government
- *Academies and Free Schools* – funded by central government, often part of a *Trust*
- *Faith schools* – associated with a particular religion

You can also choose to teach your child at home, either full or part-time. This is called *home education* (or *elective home education* or *home schooling*). Find out more here:

<https://www.gov.uk/home-education>



## 1. How can I find a school place for my child?

If your child is aged 5 to 16 years old, contact your *local council* (also called the *Local Authority* or *LA*) to find a school place for your child.

- The *local council* must find a school place in the local area if your child is aged 5 to 16 years old
- You can find more information about school admissions here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions>

### Here are some ideas to help you decide which school you like:

- Visit the school during open evenings. These will be advertised on the school website.
- Read their most recent Ofsted inspection report: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>
- Check the school's overall performance:  
<https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/>
- Talk to other parents about what they think of the school
- Look at their school website
- Find out which schools enrol students in home language GCSE exams (see section 5 below for more information)

### When you know which schools you like, remember to:

- Fill in the online application form, giving a few schools you like
- Ask for help from your local council's *School Admissions Team* as the school application process can be complicated
- Ask the council if there are other people, community groups or interpreters who can help you

## 2. What age will my child start secondary school?

In England, children start secondary school in the September immediately after their 11th birthday. Secondary school begins in Year 7 (Years 1-6 are in primary school) and ends in Year 11.

The academic year always starts in September and usually ends in July. It is usually divided into three terms of approximately 13 weeks.

Young people can leave school on the last Friday in June if they will be 16 by the end of August. However, young people aged 16 to 18 must be in education, training or on an apprenticeship.

### 3. How do I find out about school terms and holidays?

School term and holiday dates vary across England.

However, school holidays are usually at the end of December and beginning of January (Christmas and New Year); March/April (depending on when Easter falls) and August. Additionally, most schools will have a half term holiday in the middle of each of the three terms. Each school will publish its own school calendar with holidays marked on it.

Many schools have 5 INSET (**IN SE**rvice Training) days each year when teachers will attend training and meetings. Students do not attend schools on INSET days. Schools will inform parents about when the INSET days are each year.

Speak to the school to find out the exact term and holiday dates or look at this website:  
<https://www.gov.uk/school-term-holiday-dates>

### 4. What can I expect from school?

Most schools publish their own *School Prospectus*, a booklet which provides important information about the school. Additionally, the school website will include the most recent information and news about the school. Ask the school for help to translate information if you need to.

For your child, there will be:

- *Transition days*; Year 6 students will have the opportunity to spend one or two days in their new secondary school to see what it will be like
- An *induction programme* to help your child make a good start to life in their new school. This might include special arrangements if your child has recently arrived in the country or the area, or is starting school at a different time in the year (i.e. not September).
- A place in a form class of about 30 pupils, usually of the same age. Each form usually has their own form tutor.
- A regular *timetable* of lessons. Each lesson will be taught by a subject specialist.
- Access to a full curriculum – see below for more information
- An inclusive approach where all children are treated fairly
- Regular homework linked to the curriculum



### What else will my child do at school?

Your child will be able to take part in activities, school trips and other events. These might include:

- Assemblies and opportunities for collective worship. Ask your school for more information.
- Extra-curricular activities and clubs, e.g. sport, music and drama. These are not compulsory and might be at lunch time or after school has finished. There might be a small charge for some clubs.
- School trips to places which are linked to the school curriculum. There is usually a payment for these trips, but schools are often able to help with this where necessary. School trips are carefully organised by teachers so that children are always safe. Some trips are a compulsory part of a GCSE course, e.g. for GCSE drama, students need to watch a play at the theatre.
- School productions including drama performances and music concerts
- Social events and fundraising events such as sports days, summer and Christmas fairs, discos and quizzes. Speak to your school if you are interested in becoming more involved in your child's school, for example volunteering or serving as a parent governor, where you could support the leadership team in ensuring the school is as effective as it can be.
- Work experience is an opportunity for young people, usually in Year 10, to spend a week in a workplace. For more information, see the careers section below.



### How will I know what is happening at school?

Your school will communicate regularly with you. Schools will use different forms of communication including:

- *School website*: schools will share information on their website. Check the school calendar to know important dates like holidays, teacher training (INSET) days and parents' evenings.
- *Notifications*: text message, social media (e.g. Twitter) and apps like parentmail, can also be used to make payments for school meals and trips
- *Online systems* (e.g. Go4Schools): you can find information about homework, assessments and behaviour
- *Emails and letters*: tell the school if you do not have access to emails
- *Parents' evenings and reports*: these will let you learn more about your child's progress
- *Meetings and information evenings*: schools will use meetings to share important information. e.g. choosing which subjects to study at GCSE. This can be a useful opportunity to ask questions.
- *Direct communication*: you can contact school by phone or email, or arrange for a meeting with the teacher if this is appropriate



## 5. What will school expect from me?

As a parent, you will be expected to:

- Send your child to school every day and on time, unless they are ill, have an appointment or it is a religious holiday. Contact the school in advance to tell them why your child is absent if you can.
- Take your children on holiday in the school holidays only. If you decide to take your children on holiday during term time, you may have to pay a fine. Speak to the school to find out more or look at this website: <https://www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence>
- Tell the school about any important events or circumstances for your child or family. They will try their best to support you if you need help.
- Provide information such as medical details and contact details. It is important that you tell the school if this information changes.
- Complete consent forms to say if your child is allowed to go on school trips, have photographs taken etc.
- Support school policies, e.g. behaviour and appropriate use of the internet. You can find information about school policies on the school's website. You and your child will be told about rewards and sanctions. Your child will have a school email account and access to the internet which they must use safely and appropriately.
- Help your child with their homework. For more ideas on how to support your child with their learning see [here](#).



## 6. Who's who in school?

Look at the School Prospectus or school website to see photographs and names of staff members; sometimes these are on display in the school entrance too.

Ask the school which staff members will be working with your child. These may include:

- Senior Leaders – e.g. the Principal, Vice and Assistant Principals
- Office Staff – e.g. the school Receptionists
- Teaching Staff – e.g. the Class Teacher and Teaching Assistant
- Pastoral Staff – e.g. Year Leaders, Form Tutor, Learning Mentor
- Specialist Staff – e.g. EAL Teachers (English as an Additional Language), SENDCo (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator), Designated Safeguarding Lead Teacher (DSL)



## 7. What is taught and tested in school?

Usually students will sit national exams in the May and June of Year 11. Most students will sit GCSE exams (General Certificate of Secondary Education).

Please look at the table below to find out which *Phase, Stage* and *Year Group* your child will be in – and which *Assessments/Tests/Exams* they will have:



Phase	Stage	Year Group	Age Range	Assessments/ Tests/ Exams	Subjects studied
Secondary	Key Stage 3	Year 7 Year 8 Year 9	11-12 12-13 13-14	Start of Year 7 and regularly throughout KS3: Cognitive Assessment Tests (CATs)  On-going internal assessments	English, maths, science, design and technology, history, geography, religious studies (RS), art, design and technology (DT), music, drama, physical education, computing, citizenship, languages
	Key Stage 4	Year 10 Year 11	14-15 15-16	On-going internal assessments  May/June of Year 11: GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and equivalent exams	Core subjects: English, maths, science  Optional subjects vary between schools. They include geography, history, RS, computer science, PE, business studies, childcare, DT, creative media. Ask your school for the full list.

Find more detailed information at <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum>

### Will my child do exams in every subject?

Usually children sit national exams (GCSEs) at the end of Year 11. They will not sit an exam in every subject. The core subjects are: English, maths and science. All students must study these subjects. Additionally, students usually sit exams in a further five subjects.

At the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 8 or Year 9) the school will help your child choose which other subjects to continue studying for their final exams. This might include GCSE subjects (e.g. geography or design and technology) or BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) subjects (e.g. business studies and sport).

Some schools also arrange for students to sit a GCSE in their first language, although not every language is available. Arabic, Chinese, Urdu, Gujarati and Italian are some of the GCSEs available. Ask your school if this is something you want your child to do.

Talk to your child about their interests and their plans for the future. It is important to choose subjects that interest them and that will be useful for their future. Talk to your school about your child's options and about what support will be available.

## 8. What will my child need?

- Full school uniform: most secondary schools in England expect children to wear a school uniform. Your child's school will provide a list of what to wear and tell you where you can buy it. Ask if the school can support with costs if you do not have enough money.
- A planner. Most schools provide a book each year to help students organise themselves.
- A bag, a pencil case with pens etc.
- A calculator and other maths equipment
- Full PE (physical education) kit when required. The school will tell you what is needed as this may include sports clothes that have the school's logo.
- Lunch or money to buy food. Many schools have a contactless payment system; the office staff will be able to help organise this. Some children can also receive *Free School Meals (FSM)* if the family is on certain benefits; find out more from your school or from <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>
- A travel pass or travel money if your child travels to school by bus, tram or train. Some children who live more than two miles from the school can get a free bus pass. Find out if you are entitled to a free bus pass by going to <https://www.gov.uk/help-home-school-transport>. Some children who cannot walk to school because of a mobility problem or a special educational need will be given free transport to school, often in a taxi. Find out more information <https://www.gov.uk/apply-school-transport-for-child-with-special-educational-needs-sen>
- Ask your school about their *mobile phone policy*. Some schools do not allow mobiles and may confiscate them if students try to use them in school.





## 9. What extra support is there for students who need it?

- *Pastoral support*: all schools have a team of people who will help children who have any problems, for example, with friendships, mental health issues or feeling worried. Tell the Form Tutor or Year Leader if your child has any problems or worries.
- All schools have a *Designated Safeguarding Lead* who will support your child if there are any serious concerns about their safety in or out of school.
- *English language support*: most schools will provide support with English language development where this is needed. This will normally take place in the classroom with other students.
- *Learning support*: all schools will provide extra support with learning when it is needed. Tell the school if you think your child needs support with their learning. The SENDCo (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator) will meet with your child, assess their needs and provide the best support. They will tell you if your child has any needs and you may be asked to go into school to talk about how the school can help your child. There is a helpful guide for parents and carers here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-guide-for-parents-and-carers>
- *External agencies*: schools work closely with other professionals such as doctors, refugee agencies and educational specialists to support children who need extra help. The school will tell you about any extra support your child needs.
- *Pupil Premium*: all schools receive extra funding to support students who are economically disadvantaged. This money is used to help the students do well at school and be fully involved in school life.
- *Financial support*: schools can help with some costs, for example, school uniform, school trips, equipment etc. Tell the school if you need help with any expenses.
- *Careers advice and further education*: all schools have a careers adviser who will help your child start thinking about what they want to do when they leave school. They will help your child to:
  - Choose which subjects to study at GCSE. *Options* are chosen at the end of Year 8 or 9.
  - Find a suitable work experience placement. Not all schools offer work experience. Ask your school for more information.
  - Find information about colleges and courses for after Year 11. Young people are expected to be in education or training until they are 18. You can find more information at: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/education/find-course>

## 10. How can I help my child to learn?

There are many ideas for how to help your child learn in this [leaflet](#).