

Accessing Secondary Education in England, UK

The United Kingdom or UK is made up of 4 countries; England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all of which have a similar education system with few but significant differences.

This service provides information on the system in England which is a popular destination for foreign students at all levels. England is the largest of the 4 countries in the UK and is the most diverse, with people from all over world making it their home or destination of choice for their children's education.

Transferring to a school in a different country has many challenges including but not limited to a different syllabus and teaching style. The consensus is that the system in the UK is superior to that in Africa, including Nigeria, and as such it is the desire of many parents to have their children educated in an English school in their country or if circumstances allow transfer them to a school in England.

It is important to know that not all schools are created equal, so locals are at an advantage when it comes to choosing the right school for their children at both primary and secondary level. The most desirable schools are often oversubscribed i.e. have more applicants than there are places, and often conduct entrance exams for their intakes.

Preparation for these exams start as early as when a child is 6 years old and many parents also move to the school's catchment area(a designated area beyond which applications are not likely to be considered) to increase their chances of getting a place.

Primary school places are allocated on the basis of distance and the local authority you reside in. There are different schools in this category as well, but most parents make their choice based on the academic performance of the school as gleaned from their OFSTED reports and the attainment of their students as compared to other schools in official league tables.

Attendance at a good primary school is a step in the right direction as secondary entrance exams are for children who have been exposed to the right kind of learning, which is then supplemented by private tuition.

Types of Secondary Schools in England, UK

There are 2 main types of secondary schools in England; Independent schools (fee paying) made up of both private and public schools while the other is a group of schools known collectively as state/government funded schools.

This classification sounds counterintuitive as the term 'public' means the opposite in some country's educational system.

Public schools started life as charity schools established to educate poor students; the term "public" was used to indicate that admission was not to be restricted on the basis of religion, parental occupation or locality. The schools were also subject to public management or control this was in contrast to private schools which were run for the personal profit of the owners.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

These schools charge fees and often have their own exams. Most offer boarding as well as day places while some accept only day students. The rules for each school differs so the service offered will be one which aims to give your child as much help as possible to bridge the knowledge gap so they will have a better chance of passing the entrance exams.

Those who do not qualify for a non-fee paying school can apply to fee paying schools.

STATE SCHOOLS

State schools are funded by the government to provide free education to UK residents. They consist of:

1. Community schools, which are controlled by the local council and operate on the basis of their rules. These schools are not influenced by businesses or religious groups.
2. Foundation schools (also known as voluntary schools) which have more freedom than community schools with the way they operate.
3. Free schools are non-profit organisations funded by the government and not the local council. These schools have a lot more control over how they operate, for example, they are allowed to deviate from the national curriculum.
4. Academies, which are independent schools that are funded by the government but like free schools, they don't have to follow the national curriculum.
5. Grammar schools are run by the council and typically have a selection process like that of an exam, to gauge the ability of students and offer places to those that excel.
6. State boarding schools offer free education; however, there are fees for boarding. These schools tend to be academies but can be free schools or run by local councils.

Foreign nationals, who wish to apply for a state-funded school place, need to check that they have a right of abode, indefinite leave to remain or that the conditions of their immigration status permits them to access a state-funded school

GRAMMAR SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE UK

There are 5 main types of state-funded secondary schools in the UK;

- Community,
- Foundation,
- Free(a variant of community),
- Academy,
- Grammar.

Amongst these, the Grammar schools have pride of place as they are the reserve of the most academically able students who must sit and pass an exam. The exam, popularly

referred to simply as **'the 11 PLUS'**, though most children will be months shy of their 11th birthday when they sit the exam, is a challenging test of math, literacy, and reasoning skills.

Admission to a grammar school is highly sought after due to their academic excellence which comes at no cost to parents. Competition is stiff, especially with children who have attended top fee-paying primary schools also competing for these places. Those not fortunate enough to attend top-end primary schools will require the help of a private tutor to prepare for the exam, which includes reasoning subjects not taught at school and a much higher level of literacy and math which goes beyond the primary school curriculum.

Typically, around 30% of those who sit the exams will pass, and with only a limited number of places in various local areas, not all those who pass are guaranteed a place.

The exams are often sat in September with results being released the following month. Places are then offered in March with a requirement for parents to accept or decline a place within a set period.

Those who are eligible will benefit from being educated alongside other academically able children, 99% of whom will go on to study at top universities around the country.

APPLYING FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY

British citizens who live abroad and families looking to relocate to England are often overwhelmed by the preparation and application process and so miss out on a place; even UK-based families need expert help to prepare their children for the 11 plus exam and navigate the application and school selection process. This is primarily due to the verbal and non-verbal elements, which are not standard school subjects, and the extension work required in Math and English.