

FINDING A SCHOOL IN THE UK

By

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Where can I find information about UK schools?

The following websites all have search facilities that enable you to search for different types of independent school in the UK.

www.isc.co.uk

This is the website of the Independent Schools Council, which represents independent schools in the UK and British Schools overseas. The advanced search facility helps you to narrow your search to specific types of school, including mixed or co-educational, day or boarding and by religious affiliation.

www.scis.org.uk

This is the website of the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), which promotes and supports independent education in Scotland. On their website you can search for a school using criteria such as location and school type.

www.isbi.com

isbi schools aims to provide information about independent, special, boarding and international schools in the British Isles and worldwide to parents. The search facility enables you to find a school using search criteria such as location, entry age, special needs and scholarships.

www.boarding.org.uk

The Boarding Schools' Association (BSA) is the association that promotes and serves boarding education in the UK. You can use the advanced search facility to search by criteria such as school type, facilities and scholarships, or you can click on the map of the UK to narrow your search.

www.indschools.co.uk

The Independent Schools Directory UK has a database of around 2,000 independent schools in the UK. You can search for a school by criteria such as type of school, location, fee band and religious affiliation.

www.the-bac.org

The British Accreditation Council is the national accrediting body for private post-16 education in the UK. The college search enables you to search by college type, such as 'independent sixth form', 'business and professional' and 'higher education'.

www.cife.org.uk

The Council for Independent Further Education provides information for students and parents who are interested in study at pre-university level. You can use the search facility to find a suitable college and use their map to find out the location of the college.

Can I obtain information in my own language?

Your local British Council office will be able to provide information about studying in the UK in your language. Contact details of offices around the world can be obtained from www.britishcouncil.org.

Some of the schools that attract a large number of overseas students now have a translation service on their website, providing information about their school in a number of languages. Consult individual websites for more information.

Should I visit the UK to choose a school?

Visiting the school is the best way to make sure that you choose the right school for your child. It will enable you to view the school facilities and meet the staff and other students. Often it is hard to obtain an accurate and complete picture of a school from individual websites or prospectuses. Therefore, you should try to visit the UK before choosing a school.

When should I visit the school?

You will need to make sure that you arrange your visit well in advance of the start of term and before entrance examinations so that your child has plenty of time to fill in application forms and take the required exams. Staff at the school will be able to offer advice about the most appropriate time to visit.

Independent schools in the UK also arrange 'Open Days'. These are days when they encourage parents and prospective students to visit the school, view facilities and talk to staff and students. A list of Open Days will be available on the school website or in the prospectus.

Will the school provide accommodation for our visit?

This depends on the school and the time of year. Some schools, if they have rooms available, will provide accommodation for which there will be a small charge. Contact the school to find out whether this is the case.

What other accommodation is available?

In the UK the main types of accommodation available for visitors from overseas are in guest houses, hotels, motels, public houses/inns, holiday homes and campsites. Staff at the school should be able to provide you with a list of suitable accommodation in the area, or you can contact the local tourist information office for more information. Details of tourist information offices can be obtained from the websites listed at the end of this e-book.

How much is accommodation?

Costs vary according to the type of accommodation and the area in which you are staying. In general, guest houses tend to be cheaper than hotels. Remember that in the UK prices are often quoted per person, per night, rather than per room, per night. If you want to stay in the same place for more than 5 days, it might be cheaper to find a holiday home. The following list gives an example of the prices you might expect to pay for accommodation in the UK:

- Campsites (tents/caravans) - £8 to £20 per pitch.
- Guest houses - £15 to £40 per person, per night.
- Motels - £25 to £55 per person, per night.
- Public houses/inns - £25 to £65 per person, per night.
- Hotels - £30 to £70 per person, per night.
- Holiday homes - £150 to £400 per week for the home, depending on size and type.

Prices tend to be higher in the larger cities, especially London. Some special offers are available if you decide to travel outside the main holiday season. In the UK, this tends to be from October to March.

How do I choose the right school?

When thinking about a suitable school for your child, there are many factors that you need to take into account:

Finance

- Can you afford to send your child to a school in the UK? Independent schools can be expensive and you will need to make sure that you have enough money available for the duration of the course. Immigration officials will want to know that you have enough money to support your child through his or her stay in the UK.
- Are you happy to provide enough money for your child's support while he or she is in the UK? Schools do not like their pupils to carry large amounts of money on their person, but they will have a safe deposit box for money and allocate it to pupils when appropriate. Or you may choose to open a bank account while your child is studying in the UK.
- Will there be enough money available for your child to travel home during the vacations? If not, is your child happy to live in the UK when he or she is not at school? Will you have enough money available to visit your child in the UK if you need to?
- Is your choice of school restricted by the amount of money you have available? A number of scholarship schemes are available for international students who wish to study in the UK. Contact your British Council office for more information, or consult their online scholarship database: www.educationuk.org/scholarships. Also, many

independent schools offer their own scholarships, so contact individual schools for more information.

Day or boarding school

- Would you prefer your child to be a day pupil or a boarding pupil? Although you may think that since your child is an overseas student he or she must board, this is not always the case. Some schools will arrange for your child to live with a local family or you might have a family friend or relative close to the school that may be able to look after your child.
- Have you considered weekly boarding? Your child could board at the school during the week and live with a friend or relative in the UK at the weekend. This may be a good option if your friend or relative lives too far from the school for your child to commute daily, but close enough for a weekly commute.

When to send your child

- Is your child at the right age to be sent to study in the UK? Is he or she mature enough to cope with the upheaval and cultural change?
- Would you prefer to send your child to a junior school, senior school or both? You can send your child to a school in the UK at any age, but you need to think about the qualification system in the UK and make sure that your child has adequate preparation time for any examinations that he or she intends to take.

Single-sex or co-educational

- Do you prefer your child to study in a single-sex school or a mixed school? Which type of school does your child prefer? If your child prefers to study in a mixed school, but you prefer a single-sex school, it is possible to choose a mixed school that teaches pupils in single-sex classes.

Academic level

- How academically able is your child? Within the UK independent school sector there are various options available in terms of academic excellence. You need to assess your child's ability honestly and realistically. Children who are sent to a school that pushes them too hard may find the pressure too great. Would your child be able to cope in that type of environment? Or would he or she be better attending a school that emphasises others abilities, such as in sport, music, drama or vocational and life skills?
- Have you spoken to teachers at your child's current school to find out their assessment of your child's abilities? You need to have a clear idea of these and match the choice of school with your child's abilities, wants and needs.

Religion

- Is religion important to you and your child? There are a variety of denominational schools in the UK and most of these welcome children of other faiths. If religion is important you can conduct a search for school by religious faith using the advanced search facility available on some of the websites listed above.
- Would you prefer to send your child to a non-denominational school? If so, you can use some of the search facilities mentioned above to find a suitable school.

Special educational needs

- Does your child have any special educational needs that should be addressed while he or she is studying in the UK? Some schools will offer extra help and support for your child, but you must check that this is the case before you make your choice of school. Staff will be happy to discuss your child's needs during your visit.
- Does your child have any special talents that should be nurtured while they are at school in the UK? If so, use the advanced search facility available on some of the websites listed above as this will help you to find schools that offer extra support and encouragement.

Dietary requirements

- Is your child on a special diet? Most schools will cater for special diets but you should check that this is the case before making your choices.

Qualifications

- Does your child need to obtain qualifications in the English language to use for university and college applications? If so, you should consider a school that has a department offering specialist English language tuition and the opportunity to take the required examinations.
- Do you want your child to study for A Levels, vocational A Levels or the International Baccalaureate (IB)? Some schools will offer only A Levels; some will offer vocational A Levels and standard A Levels together; others will offer all three qualifications. Information about all levels of qualifications offered in the UK can be obtained from the education and learning section of www.direct.gov.uk and from the website of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency: www.qcda.gov.uk. More information about qualifications and how they compare with qualifications worldwide can be obtained from www.naric.org.uk.

Progression routes

- What do you expect your child to do after their schooling in the UK? Will the school prepare your child for what he or she wants to do on completion of his or her schooling?
- If your child is hoping to progress to university, will he or she receive the right qualifications for this? Does the school offer good academic preparation and a comprehensive educational advice service?
- If your child is hoping to obtain employment after his or her studies, does the school provide adequate preparation for this? Is there comprehensive careers guidance and vocational training available?

Immigration

- Will your child meet the conditions for the Tier 4 points-based visa system for immigration, which is for migrants who want to study in the UK? The Tier 4 (Child) category is for children coming to the UK to be educated between the ages of four and 17 years old. Children between four and 15 years old must be educated at independent fee-paying schools. The only publicly funded education providers that can teach Tier 4 (Child) students are publicly funded further education colleges that are able to charge for international students. Comprehensive information about these rules can be obtained from the UK Border Agency: www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk. More information about visa rules for studying in the UK can be obtained from www.ukvisas.gov.uk.
- Is your child's passport suitable and up-to-date?
- Will you, and family members, be able to visit your child in the UK? Are your passports suitable and up-to-date? Will you meet all the rules laid out by the UK Border Agency? See www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visitingtheuk/visitors/eligibility for more information about these rules and regulations.

Physical environment

- When choosing a school you might be interested to find out whether there are any potential health risks to your child, such as air pollution or flooding. You can enter the postcode of your chosen school to view maps for all areas in the UK by visiting the Environment Agency website: www.environment-agency.gov.uk.
- If you want to know about crime levels, the Home Office is the government department responsible for internal affairs in England and Wales. For more information about all aspects of crime and security, visit www.homeoffice.gov.uk. The Home Office has produced a useful online tool that enables you to search through Recorded Crime Statistics of the local authority in the area in which you wish your child to study. For more information, visit www.crimestatistics.org.uk. Additional information about crime in the UK can be obtained from www.crimereduction.gov.uk.

More information about crime in Scotland can be obtained from www.scotland.gov.uk.

Health

- Boarding schools in the UK employ nurses and/or matrons who take care of day-to-day medical needs. They work closely with local doctors/general practitioners (GPs) and/or have a medical centre on the school campus for more serious ailments and accidents. Boarding schools have a special room set aside for children with common childhood illnesses in which to recuperate and recover. Contact the school direct for more information about their medical facilities. If your child has special medical requirements you will need to check that the school is able to cope with their needs.
- All international school pupils on courses for more than 6 months in the UK are covered by the National Health Service (NHS). This means that your child will receive free hospital and medical treatment and reduced dentist and optician fees. For more information about the National Health Service, visit www.nhs.uk. For information about other aspects of health in the UK, visit the Department of Health website: www.dh.gov.uk.

How do I avoid choosing a bad school?

When contacting a school, find out whether it has been inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), which ensures that schools meet certain standards in provision and facilities. More information about the ISI can be obtained from www.isi.net. Alternatively, find out whether the school has been inspected by OFSTED. Visit www.ofsted.gov.uk for more information. You can ask to see inspection reports to help you to make an informed decision about the school.

At what age should my child apply to a school in the UK?

Applications for entry to independent schools in the UK can be made at various stages. The main entry points to junior school tend to be at nursery, ages 3/4, and the first year of primary, ages 4/5. However, many independent schools will not accept boarding pupils at this age, so, if you wish your child to board, you may have to wait until he or she is older.

Other popular entry points are at ages 6/7 and ages 9/10. Some boarding schools will accept overseas students at this age. The most popular entry points at senior level are at ages 11/12 and ages 12/13. Sixth form and college entry is at age 16.

How do I apply for a place at a UK school?

The application procedure varies from school to school so you should obtain more information from the school in which you are interested. As a general guide, you will need to follow the procedure set out below:

- Request a school prospectus to find out about the preferred application process.
- Make sure that your child has the required qualifications and necessary level of English language skills, as specified in the prospectus.
- Find out whether your child is likely to meet the Tier 4 (Child) immigration requirements.
- Find out whether the school requires that your child has a guardian in the UK and/or a correspondence address in the UK. If so, you will need to make sure that these can be provided before you submit your application. Some schools will offer advice about finding a guardian for your child. AEGIS is the Association for the Education and Guardianship of International Students. On their website you can find information about choosing a guardian along with links to guardian organisations in the UK: www.aegisuk.net.
- Find out whether fees need to be paid through a UK bank account and, if so, make sure that you, or your child's guardian, will be able to obtain this type of bank account.
- Visit the school with your child. You will be shown all the school facilities and will be able to determine whether this is the best choice. If you are happy with the choice, request an application/registration form.
- Fill in the application/registration form. Some schools will require that you pay a registration fee. This can range from £50 to £150.

At what time of year are applications made?

Applications are usually made in the autumn of the year prior to admission and many schools will hold Open Days throughout the autumn term. Interviews and entry examinations are normally held in the spring term. However, schools are flexible for applicants from overseas and will try to deal with your child's application whatever the time of year.

What happens once my child has made an application?

Most schools will require your child to sit an entrance examination that may include a test of their English language skills. Some schools will enable your child to take this test during your visit, whereas others will require your child to sit a test with other candidates on a specified date.

Some schools will arrange for your child to sit the test in your home country, if visiting the UK is difficult. This can be arranged through your local British Council office, but you will be required to pay any associated costs.

In some cases your child will not have to sit an exam, but will need to supply a written letter from their current teacher, outlining their suitability for study in the UK. Your child may

need to write an essay of a certain length so that the school can assess his or her English language ability and find out more about your child.

How can my child improve his or her chances of making a successful application?

You can help your child by making sure that all the necessary paperwork is completed. The school will want to know that your child is likely to be granted a visa before they are willing to offer a place. Also, they will want to know that you are able to pay the course fees in the specified way. This means that you need to make sure that you have enough money to cover the fees for the duration of your child's schooling in the UK.

You may need to sort out someone to act as a guardian while your child studies in the UK. Some schools will require proof of this before they accept your child's application.

Admission to most schools depends on successful examination results, so you need to make sure that your child has reached the required academic level to be accepted at the school. Some schools ask for a report from your child's previous school so that they can find out whether your child is suitable for admission. Therefore, your child will be more successful when making an application if he or she has a good school record.

What happens if my child's application is successful?

If your child has made a successful application the school will notify you of the decision to accept your child. You must contact them as soon as possible to say whether you are happy to accept the place as schools will not hold the place open indefinitely.

Some schools will ask that you pay an additional registration fee once you have accepted the offer of a place and this could be in the region of £50 to £150. Also, some schools will require families from overseas to pay a security deposit, which could be in the region of £1,000 - £3,000. In most cases this will be held by the school and returned to you when your child's course finishes. Some schools will deduct any extra expenses incurred during your child's schooling from this deposit. Your child's place will not be confirmed until the school has received the appropriate registration fee and security deposit.

Where can I find more information?

Visit your local British Council office for more information or consult their website: www.britishcouncil.org.

More information about visiting the UK can be obtained from the following websites:

www.visitbritain.com
www.visitscotland.com
www.visitwales.com
www.visitengland.com
www.discovernorthernireland.com

More information about funding for international students who wish to study in the UK can be obtained from *Studying in the UK: Sources of Financial Support*, which is available as a free download from www.cedawson.co.uk.