

# British Culture 7 - British Schools

## General Information

British students start school at the age of 5. Education is compulsory (British students have no choice! They have to go to school!) until the age of 16.

The school year starts in September and ends in July.

There are three different education stages:

- 1) When they are 3-4 years old, British children go to a nursery school.
- 2) When they are 5-11 years old, British children go to a primary school.
- 3) When they are 12-18, British teenagers go to a secondary school.



## Types of Secondary Schools

There are different types of secondary schools. Some are non fee-paying, others are fee-paying (i.e. parents pay for their children to go to these schools).

Non fee-paying schools include comprehensive schools and grammar schools. Almost 88% of British secondary school students go to comprehensive schools. Comprehensive schools are non-selective and mixed sex / co-educational (= for both boys and girls).

Other students go to grammar schools. Grammar schools are selective (British students must take a test of ability called 'the 11+ test') and single sex (i.e. there are grammar schools for boys and there are grammar schools for girls).

Fee-paying schools are also called independent schools or public schools. 7% of English secondary school students go to independent schools. Public schools are selective and single-sex. The three most famous public schools in England are Eton College, Harrow School and Winchester College.



Eton College

## School Uniforms

In the United Kingdom, every student must wear a school uniform. Girls usually wear a skirt or trousers, a white blouse, a dark-coloured jumper, black shoes and socks or ties. Boys usually wear black trousers, a white shirt, a school tie, and a dark-coloured jumper. At some schools, the students wear blazers (= jackets) in school colours with the school badge on the pocket.

Most British students do not mind wearing a uniform because all their friends have to wear a uniform too! Parents are also in favour of school uniforms because this means no arguments with their children about what they want to wear and there is also no pressure on their children to buy expensive clothes to impress their friends. Many people think that school uniforms are easy and straightforward (= not complicated): you do not have to think about what you are going to wear. School uniforms also give a sense of



identity: British students wear the colours of their schools! Moreover, with a school uniform, people cannot guess your social background. Many teachers are also in favour of school uniforms because they think school uniforms help with discipline. Finally, school uniforms mean that there is no competition among the students to see who looks the best: they are all the same!

Some students do not like wearing a school uniform though, because they think it is boring. Some even feel like they are in a prison when they wear a uniform! They also say that you cannot express yourself with a school uniform.

## No Uniform Day

Sometimes British schools have a "no uniform day". British students go to school wearing their normal clothes. They actually pay £1 for the right to wear their normal clothes! This is a way of raising money for charity. It is often the children themselves who choose which charity they want to support.



## School Subjects

British students must study maths, English, Science, ICT (Information Technology), Drama, Music, Art, Physical Education (PE), and Humanities (History, Geography, and Religion).

## A Typical School Day

School usually starts at 8.55 a.m. with registration. Registration is when the teacher calls the students' names to see if they are present. Then, at 9.10 a.m., British students go to assembly. During assembly, the students sing songs, listen to a story and pray.

The first lesson begins at 9.20 a.m. Then the students have break time from 10.20 to 10.35. During this break, they can have a snack and play games outside. After the break, they have another lesson until lunch at 12 o'clock. Afternoon lessons start at 1.10 p.m. The last lesson finishes at 3.15 p.m.

(Adapted from <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/education/schday.html>)

