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LANDFALL GUIDE · SCHOOLS & FAMILY

How do UK schools work for American families?

THE SHORT ANSWER

State schools are free, and places are allocated by your local council, mainly by where you live. Children are grouped by age into "years", which run from September, and start school younger than in the US. Private schools charge fees. Scotland's system is different again.

For US citizens and green card holders moving to the UK. Build your free, personal move plan at **yourlandfall.com/plan**.

This guide covers England in most detail. Scotland's system is different. See schools in Scotland.

Ages and year groups

The school year runs from **September to July**, and children are grouped by their age on **September 1**.

UK (England)	Age during the year	Rough US equivalent
Reception	4–5	Pre-K / kindergarten
Years 1–6 (primary)	5–11	Kindergarten to 5th grade
Years 7–11 (secondary)	11–16	6th to 10th grade
Years 12–13 (sixth form)	16–18	11th and 12th grade

Children usually start **Reception** in the September after they turn four, a year earlier than many US kindergartens.

Exams

- **GCSEs** at the end of Year 11 (age 16), usually in 8–10 subjects.
- **A levels** in Years 12–13, usually in three subjects, which UK universities use for admission. Some schools offer the **International Baccalaureate** instead.

Getting a place

- **State schools are free.** Apply through your **local council**.
- Popular schools use criteria such as **distance from home**, siblings and sometimes faith. Where you live matters a great deal.
- There are fixed dates for September entry, but you can apply **"in year"** when you arrive. Councils usually want a UK address first.
- Check a school's **Ofsted** inspection report and visit if you can.
- Some areas have **grammar schools**, selective state schools with an entrance test at age 10–11.

Private schools

Independent schools charge fees, which now include **VAT**. Confusingly, some of the oldest are called "public schools". Many have their own entrance tests and waiting lists.

Thinking about US college?

UK qualifications are accepted by US colleges, but plan early: check what testing your target colleges want, keep track of extracurriculars, and look at schools with experience of US applications.

University fees

Whether your child pays “home” or international fees at a UK university depends on their **immigration status and residence history**, not just living here. Check this well before applications.

What to do next

Build your move plan and choose “A family with children” to add school steps.

See every step for your move. Answer five questions and get a free plan in the right order: yourlandfall.com/plan