6 Culture

British public schools

4.12

In the UK, 93% of children go to state schools, which are funded by the government. The remaining 7% go to private schools, which the government does not fund or control. The students pay fees to attend these schools. A small group of very old private schools are, confusingly, known as 'public schools'. These include Eton College, which has educated nineteen British Prime Ministers over the past three centuries – as well as many other famous people from around the world, including Prince William and Prince Harry, actor Hugh Laurie and the former king of Nepal.

To many people, these public schools seem very odd and old-fashioned, with their strange uniforms and confusing traditions. For example, all of the public schools divide the academic year into three terms. At Eton College, these are called 'halves', but at Charterhouse they're called 'quarters' (and the shortest of the three is known as the 'long quarter').

Although private schools seem irrelevant to most British people, the influence they have on society is very real. That is because a very large number of people in important positions attended these schools, including 71% of senior judges and 62% of senior officers in the armed forces. Some people even argue that the UK parliament does not represent the country because 32% of MPs are privately educated.



1 **SPEAKING** Describe the photo, which shows children having breakfast at a 'public school' in England. How is it different from the canteen at your school? Would you like to eat here? Why? / Why not?

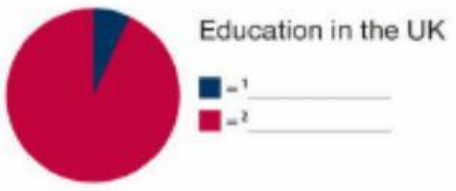
2 Read the text. Which of these sentences is true about schools in the UK?

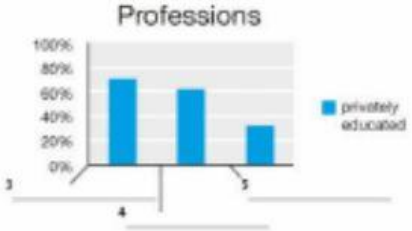
a All 'public schools' are private schools.
b All private schools are 'public schools'.
c All state schools are 'public schools'.

3 **VOCABULARY** Match a–f with 1–6 to make compounds. They are all in the text.

1 state	a year
2 private	b minister
3 prime	c forces
4 academic	d school
5 senior	e officer
6 armed	f school

4 Read the text again. Complete labels 1–5 in the charts with the correct words.





5 4.13 Listen to a radio interview about public schools. How many public schools do they mention?

6 4.13 Listen again and circle the correct answers (a–d).

1 David Brown decided to write a book about public school traditions because
  a they reminded him of his own school days.
  b he's always had an interest in public schools.
  c he works in a public school.
  d somebody else asked him to write it.
2 'The Wall Game' is a game which
  a is only played at a small number of public schools.
  b has been played since 1909.
  c involves kicking a ball over a wall to score.
  d has very few goals.
3 The sport of rugby was invented
  a by a schoolboy called Rugby in 1823.
  b by a schoolboy called Ellis at a school called Rugby College.
  c in various different countries around the same time.
  d at Eton College.
4 What does the game called 'the Greaze' involve?
  a Students throw books at a cook.
  b Students make a pancake.
  c Students try to get a piece of a pancake.
  d Students throw a pancake as high as possible.

7 **SPEAKING** What traditions are there in schools in your country? Use the ideas below to help you.

ceremonies clothes first / last day at school
food graduation public holidays
shows and performances songs

LIVEWORKSHEETS