The Education System in the UK

In this text you will find general information on the education system in the UK. As there are separate education systems in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the actual ages etc. might vary a little.

School in the UK is compulsory between the ages of five and sixteen. Children younger than five can go to a toddler group (accompanied by a parent), playgroup or nursery school.

Compulsory schooling begins at the age of five. Pupils first attend primary school, which lasts for six years. Often primary school in the UK is divided into infant school (the first two years) and junior school (the following 4 years).

After primary school, students go to secondary school until they are sixteen (practical emphasis) or 18 (secondary school with 6th form - academic emphasis).

The school year consists of three terms. Students have about 12-13 weeks of holiday per school year.

Age		School
< 5		Nursery school
5-11		Primary school
oder	5-7	Infant school
	7-11	Junior school
11-18		Secondary school with 6th form
oder	11-16	Secondary school
	16-18	6th form college

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Different Kinds of Schools

Most students in the UK are enrolled in state funded schools. These are financed through taxes, so parents do not have to pay for their children's education. But there are also numerous private schools, also known as independent schools, where education is not free of charge.

Students can choose to attend a co-educational school or a single sex school.

School Uniforms

It is common for students in the UK to wear school uniforms. They consist of:

- blazer or sweater with school logo
- shirt and tie or polo shirt / t-shirt
- dark trousers or dark skirt
- black shoes

At some schools, students are required to wear a shirt and a tie, other schools only require a t-shirt or sweater. The colour of the uniform also depends on the school – blazer, sweater, trousers and skirt are usually blue, grey, green or brown.

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When students in the UK say what year they are in, they usually use cardinal numbers, e. g. 'year ten'. (In the USA, students would use ordinal numbers, e. g. 'tenth grade'.)

Classes

At primary school, classes run Monday to Friday from about 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. There are usually between 25 and 35 pupils in one class. They primarily learn how to read, write and count. They also learn something about their country and about religion and they begin to study their first foreign language.

At secondary school, classes also run Monday to Friday, but are usually from about 8.45 to 3.30. Typical mandatory subjects are English, maths, natural sciences (biology, physics, chemistry), modern languages (French, German, Spanish), religion, citizenship, physical education, information and communication technology, geography and history. Apart from these, schools also offer optional courses from which their students can choose. At the age of sixteen, students usually sit several exams and decide whether they want to leave school or continue in a 6th form college.

Gifted and talented students can choose to enter for examinations early (one year or several terms) and then take additional courses in these or other subjects.

Grading Scale

In the UK (as in other English speaking countries) letter grades are used in reports.

- A > 80% (excellent)
- B > 70% (very good)
- C > 60% (improvement needed)
- D > 50% (close fail)
- E > 40% (fail)
- F < 40% (fail)

In general, only grades A to C are a 'pass'. Still, in the UK no student has to repeat a year – weak students can take extra lessons at school.

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