

What are Independent or Private Schools?

[Independent \(also called private or public\) schools](#) are schools which you have to pay for your child to attend. They may get a better education there but, wherever they go, a motivated, bright child will succeed – with your support.

The school your child goes to will be one of the main influences on their future life, affecting their friendships, qualifications and career prospects. With such an important choice to make, you'll need to know about all the different types of school. This guide will tell you what exactly independent or private schools are, the advantages they bring and other things you may want to bear in mind if you want to find a school that's right for your child's needs.

How many Children attend Private or Independent Schools?

The Independent Schools Council states that more than 500,000 children in the UK were attending independent or private schools in 2015 - the highest numbers since records started, forty years ago.

What is the Definition of Independent or Private Schools?

'Public,' 'private,' 'independent' or 'fee-paying' schools all refer to similar schools – those not in the state system. The term 'public school' is generally used for the much older, traditional and (originally) boys' private boarding schools – such as Eton and Harrow. Otherwise, the terms are interchangeable. Preparatory or 'Prep' schools are schools for 8-13 year olds, some of which have infants/nursery schools attached for younger children.

Why should I choose an Independent or Private School?

There are many reasons why you might want to choose an independent or private school for your child. The first one is greater choice. You can choose any private school you want your child to attend – as long as your child gets through their selection policies, and you can afford the fees. You can also choose whether your child is a boarder or day-pupil.

Are Class Sizes Smaller in Independent or Private Schools?

Independent or private schools usually have a good teacher:pupil ratio. Class sizes vary between different independent schools, but they are usually much smaller than state school classes, giving an attractive staff:pupil ratio. This means each child gets more personal attention and assistance from the teachers. Recently, births have increased every year (except 2009), creating a greater demand for school places. At the same time, there has been a reduction in the number of primary schools. This means competition for places and larger class sizes. The average class in a state primary can top 30. Many private school classes tend to be half that. However, the recession has hit everyone, so classes in some independent schools reach 28+.

Do Independent or Private Schools Give a Better Education?

Some state schools are giving independent schools a run for their money. But 2016 research on academic added-value compared independent and state schools and showed that independent education:

- is academically better at ages four, eight, ten and sixteen
- accounts for 0.64 of a GCSE grade increase
- produces higher average scores in all GCSE subjects
- in certain circumstances, outperforms the best European nations and is level with Japan and South Korea

Will my Child make Good Connections at an Independent or Private School?

One of the reasons for people choosing an independent school is the connections their child will make. A selective school with exams and interviews will choose bright, motivated children focused on learning and achievement. Aware that their parents pay more for their education, most children are determined to work hard. Many people choose schools that parents and siblings have attended, as a family tradition - but there are other things to bear in mind.

How do I Choose the Best Independent School for my Child?

Having decided on independent schooling, the next decision is to choose the best school for your child. Will the ethos and curriculum suit your child? Many – but certainly not all – independent schools focus on high academic achievement. This improves their league table scores and attracts more parents and higher fees.

Some schools pride themselves on harsh discipline, others on easy-going freedom or kindness and citizenship. A child who is more sensitive, artistic, sporty or less academic could be unhappy in the pressurised, 'hothouse' atmosphere of an elite private school. If so, make sure you find a school with a broader or more relevant curriculum, supportive pastoral care, or good social and emotional education.

All private schools must be registered with the Government and are inspected regularly. However, they are not required to follow the National Curriculum. If you would rather your child did, then check school policies before you apply.

What are the Facilities Like in Independent or Private Schools?

Private schools are often housed in beautiful buildings and, when funds permit, are well-maintained. An in-demand private school might have a state-of-the-art theatre; high-tech science laboratories; purpose-built music rooms... whereas others may struggle with outmoded facilities, equipment and upkeep. Pay any potential schools a visit, and see for yourself. Does your child have a passion/talent for activities like swimming or dance? Select a school that caters for their interests.

What will it Cost to Send my Child to an Independent or Private School?

One thing to consider about independent or private schools is the cost. What can you afford? Private school fees average more than £15,500 per year. Remember to account for all the extras – uniform, travel, school trips and educational holidays, equipment, musical instruments... the list goes on! Many independent schools provide bursaries or even full scholarships. These may be offered based on parental income, catchment area, entry examination score or other factors. Find out if your child is eligible.

How can I Compare Independent or Private Schools?

Before you choose which independent or private school you want your child to attend, you will want to compare a few of them. The Independent Schools Council is a good starting point. Make a list of preferred schools. View their websites to check admission dates and processes.

Here are a few other ways to compare independent or private schools:

- Check registration dates. Some schools require application several years ahead. School starting ages are usually 2-5, 7, 11, 13 and 16
- Do you require boarding or a day-place? Do they offer full boarding (7 days/week), weekly boarding (5-6 days/week) or flexible boarding?
- For prep (junior) schools, ask which senior schools the pupils have gone to recently
- For senior schools, check recent exam results
- Check out the Department for Education's schools' performance tables, where you can view all the schools in the country by GCSE scores, Key Stage 4 results, and English Baccalaureate. The Performance Tables site will also give a summary of A-level performance, including value-added (progress made between age 16 and 18)
- Less selective schools (academically) will not be at the top of the exam league tables, but they often have excellent value-added scores
- Read the school's latest inspection reports on the Independent Schools Inspectorate website
- Visit schools that interest you
- You can apply to several schools - especially if schools are selective and have entrance exams. It makes sense to have options. But multiple applications mean your child attending several exams and interviews, possibly adding pressure
- Some secondary schools require your child to take the Common Entrance exam at 11 or 13. Others normally require a test in English, Maths and sometimes other subjects, and will interview you and your child

So, what are independent or private schools? They are schools which you have to pay for your child to attend. Children may get a better education in independent or private schools, but, wherever they go, a motivated, bright child will succeed – with your support.