Different types of school

At a glance

Schools across England are funded and managed in different ways and will vary depending on the age of your child.

Schooling at different stages?

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| School Type | Description |
| Nursery schools | Nursery schools are stand-alone schools for children aged three and four. They have their own head teacher and staff. Some are state-funded, others are privately run (though your child might be eligible for a free part-time place). |
| Nursery classes | Nursery classes are attached to primary schools. They may have a separate building and playground away from the main school but share the same headteacher and staff. |
| Primary schools | Primary schools cater for children aged 4-11. While at primary school, children start with the Early Years (Foundation) curriculum, followed by [Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum.](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/national_curriculum_key_stages/) |
| Secondary schools | Secondary schools cater for children aged 11-16 or 18. They take pupils through Key Stages 3 and 4 of the National Curriculum. |
| Sixth form colleges | Sixth form colleges cater for young people aged 16-19. Students study for A levels and other qualifications that you can do after the age of 16, eg BTEC National Certificates. |

State or private education?

All children aged 5-16 are entitled to a free place at a state school. Most families take up this place. A few – around 6.5% - choose to pay for a place at an independent (also called a private, or – confusingly – public) school. Parents pay fees towards the cost of running an independent school.

How are state schools managed?

There are four main types of state schools funded by local authorities. They all follow the National Curriculum and are inspected by Ofsted (the government’s Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills).

They are:

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| School Type | Description |
| Community schools | Community schools are run by the local authority, which employs school staff, owns the land and buildings, and sets the entrance criteria (such as catchment area) that decide which children are eligible for a place). |
| Foundation and Trust schools | Foundation schools are run by a governing body which employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria. Land and buildings are owned either by the governing body or by a charitable foundation. Trust schools are similar, but are run together with an outside body – usually a business or charity – which has formed an educational trust. |
| Voluntary-aided schools | Voluntary-aided schools are religious or faith schools. Just like foundation schools, the governing body employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria. School buildings and land are usually owned by a charity, often a church. |
| Voluntary-controlled schools | Voluntary-controlled schools are a cross between community and voluntary-aided schools. The local authority employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria, like a community school, but the school land and buildings are owned by a charity, often a church, which also appoints some members of the governing body. |

What are Specialist schools?

State secondaries often specialise, which means they have an extra emphasis in one or two subjects. Schools can specialise in: the arts, maths and computing, business and enterprise, music, engineering, science, humanities, sports, languages, and technology.

What are Academies?

Academies are independently managed schools set up by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups in partnership with the local authority and the government Department for Children, Schools and Families.

What are City Technology Colleges?

City Technology Colleges are urban-based, independently managed secondary schools geared towards science, technology and the world of work. They offer a range of vocational qualifications as well as GCSEs and A levels.

What are special schools?

Pupils at a special school have usually been assessed and given a statement of special educational needs (SEN). These may include learning disabilities or physical disabilities. Some special schools are funded by the local education authority. These could be community, voluntary-aided or controlled, or foundation special schools. Some special schools are independent .

What is a free school?

Free Schools are normally brand-new schools set up by teachers, charities, community or faith groups, universities and groups of parents where there is parental demand. They will be set up as Academies and will be funded in the same way, directly from central government. They also share with Academies a greater control over their finances, the curriculum, and teachers' pay and conditions.